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ABSTRACT

Important trends concerning the role of the liberal arts curriculum in American higher education are discussed in this collection of conference papers. The "great books" program at St. John's College is examined in a paper by Eva T. H. Brann focusing on why the St. John's plan has endured and changed little since its inception. Authors of the Western tradition and the skills of language and mathematics are emphasized in this program. In the second paper, Gerald Grant discusses the diverse course offerings now characteristic of American institutions of higher education and the resulting lack of coherence in the curriculum. The evolution, purpose, and characteristics of the core curriculum introduced at Harvard University in 1979 is the subject of the third paper. The direction of educational reform as influenced by the core curriculum movement at Harvard is examined by Alston Chase ("Skipping Through College: Reflections of the Decline of Liberal Arts Education"). The decline in the quality of teaching and student preparation for college is discussed. Academic trends throughout the history of American higher education are reviewed and projections about the future of higher education are presented. A summary of the conference discussion and a list of conference participants is included. (SF)

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Toward the Restoration of the Liberal Arts Curriculum

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CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	v
Participants	vii
The Program of St. John's College Eva T. H. Brann	1
The Overoptioned Curriculum Gerald Grant	26
Report on the Core Curriculum Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University	37
Where Does Harvard Lead Us? Barry O'Connell	59
Skipping Through College: Reflections on the Decline of Liberal Arts Education Alston Chase	77
Discussion Summary	97

PREFACE

This conference, held at the New York office of The Rockefeller Foundation on September 28, 1978, sought to provide a forum for a broad inquiry into a number of important trends in American undergraduate education, centered around the concept of the liberal arts curriculum. In an effort to understand the tides of reform which seem to be upon us, the conference sought to examine recent changes within their historical perspective. Among the educational experiences explored were the St. John's "great books" program, which prides itself on having remained virtually fixed over the past four decades; the widespread curricular innovations of the 1960's, resulting in the "overoptioned curriculum"; and recent efforts to restore the concept of a "core" curriculum, especially in light of the action taken in 1977-78 by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University under the leadership of Dean Henry Rosovsky. These topics were addressed in several formal papers and one formal response as a prelude to and catalyst for the penetrating and thoughtful discussion that followed. We summarize that discussion here. Articles by two of the participants, which appeared in Change in September 1978 and in the Atlantic in September 1978 respectively, are also reproduced, with the kind permission of the authors and of the two magazines, as additional background papers. We wish, once again, to acknowledge Beth Greenfeld's invaluable work in organizing and editing these proceedings.

This conference owed much to the inspiration, encouragement, and planning of Dr. John H. Knowles, president of The Rockefeller Foundation until his fatal illness in March 1979. An overseer of Harvard University, and a close associate of many educational enterprises in the country, he was a staunch advocate of the highest educational standards and a firm champion of the liberal

arts and the humanities as the nucleus of a genuine undergraduate education.

The Rockefeller Foundation
June 1979

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THE PROGRAM OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND, AND SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Eva T. H. Brann

I. Principles and Parts of the Program

Every plan of education, whether borne up by a passing trend or bound into a long tradition, is fraught with implicit philosophical principle. Since the program of St. John's College is devoted to that peculiar kind of learning which of necessity includes a reflection on its own conditions, most members of the college accept the obligation--or yield to the fascination--of engaging in ever-recurrent discussion and review of the philosophical bases that underlie their activity. A part of the life of the college (some say too much, some too little) is devoted to such reflection. To mention this activity is a matter of minutes, while to reproduce even a sample of it would require not hours but, probably, years. Furthermore, precisely because it is a living inquiry, it is impossible for one member to state the results in behalf of the whole college. That would be tantamount to announcing that we had communally determined the answer to such questions as What is learning?, What are the objects of learning?, What is human nature?, What is nature?, and What is truth?

Such an announcement is, judging from good precedent, not in itself unthinkable, but it would be absurd in view of the central aim of the college, which is the pursuit of what I can only call radical inquiry. The college certainly has other and, it sometimes seems, conflicting aims. If the usual purposes of institutions of higher learning can be said to be: (1) training for scholarship or research, (2) preprofessional preparation, (3) broadening of views and sharpening of intellectual faculties and development

of the sensibility, (4) initiation into the cultural tradition--then the college eschews the first almost completely, does the second fairly adequately, succeeds in the third but erratically (that is to say, about as well as other good schools), and accomplishes the last superbly, albeit according to its own lights. But however well the college may do any of these things, it does them only incidentally to the central aim, which is to us the very purpose of liberal education.

By radical inquiry, I mean the attempt to delve as deeply as possible into the roots of the world, to bring to light not only the nature of things but also the nature of thinking. When I say that it is the central aim of the college, I do not--God forbid--mean that every waking moment is devoted to first philosophy, but rather that philosophical questions are always in the background, are always welcomed, are always on the brink of being entertained, even when the subject at hand is highly technical or acutely aesthetic.

Precisely because such an inquiry is a search for truth and substance it needs to be free, free in the sense of being conducted in a setting that imposes the fewest bars and the least presuppositions possible. The program of the college embodies an attempt to provide such a setting. If the actual life of the college is difficult to describe succinctly, its formal aspect, this very plan of learning, should be quite capable of coherent and concise presentation.

Now the program of the college consists of an almost totally prescribed course of studies. It sets not only the books to be read but also the exact order in which they are to be studied and even the times, to the hour, when and with whom they are to be discussed. It requires its students to forgo all notions of being born a humanistic or a scientific type, makes the silent speak and the speech-makers be quiet, imposes dozens of earnest

formalities, requires teachers to teach what they do not know well to students who did not particularly choose to be taught by them, and requires relentless activity in the name of true leisure. And all these constraints are imposed, I must now try to show, in the interests of intellectual freedom.

It is not, of course, academic freedom in the usual understanding, that is, the students' right to study what they please and the professors' right to say what they think. In the St. John's community, the latter is not so much a right as a duty, though a duty mitigated by pedagogic tact. The former freedom is, except for small choices, confined to the initial decision to come to the college, though that decision is never permitted to be made sight unseen. Electives, which the program excludes, are the most characteristic feature of modern university organization, significantly introduced into this country by Thomas Jefferson. They were devised on the one hand to take account of the individual talents (and, what often weighs more, the supposed inabilities) of the students, and on the other to make up for the loss of consensus concerning a universally enforceable educational plan. The St. John's program, on the contrary, is based on the assumption that certain fundamental studies are still universally accessible, reliably exciting, and formulable as a plan to which a whole faculty can commit itself. I shall try below to set out our approach to the intellectual world, an approach that still accords it enough integrity so as to engender in a faculty the confidence to derive a plan of studies from it.

The enabling freedom which is essential to our sort of inquiry depends on a program explicitly embodying <u>strong but minimal</u> notions--strong enough to help and sparing enough not to hinder inquiry.

We have agreed on two approaches as meeting these demands.

They stem from an old tradition. But it is not because they are old that we adopt them; on the contrary, they are, presumably, long-lived because they contain much pedagogical wisdom. These approaches have the medieval designation of Authors and Arts.

Authors

The wisdom of the West is handed down in a collection of books by individual authors, books of words, symbols, notes, and images, books of philosophy, science, and poetry, books of intellect, reason, and imagination. I believe that the existence of such a written tradition is an accepted fact among all educated people (even among those who cannot subscribe to the, perhaps too invidiously stated, proposition that familiarity with it is the mark of being educated). The issuing of definitive lists of these books has been a favorite activity of pedagogues since the Renaissance, and the zestful debates concerning the inclusion or exclusion of items have usually confirmed a perennial core. We tinker with our list--which we find in the main satisfactory--for various reasons. The main cause is that far more books by right belong on it than can be read in four years. (We now have an informal rule obligating anyone who wishes to add a book to the list to point out--at his peril--the one to be dropped to make room for it.) Again, certain texts turn out to be unsuccessful in discussion. Also, the splintering of the tradition in recent times makes the modern choices much less settled. So, while we invariably begin with the Homeric epics, our final readings vary. When I last taught seniors about to go forth into the so-called world, we ended most appropriately with that perfect conflation of thought and action embodied in Supreme Court decisions.

These books form a coherent tradition because their common mode is response, repudiation, revival. Each book is explicitly or implicitly a commentary on, or a critique of, preceding

books. Much as we regret having affixed to ourselves the fatuous formula of a "great books" college (and exactly one hundred of them, forsooth!), the irrefutable experience seems to be that these books are great, that they are inexhaustible in their depth and definiteness, in their responsiveness and self-sufficiency. It is, after all, by these criteria that the educated consensus has chosen them and guarded their survival.

What makes the study of these books relevant to practical inquiry is that they are all occupied with versions of the same root questions. Arguments have been made in this century claiming that these questions are radical misdirections of human effort, and that the tradition is in need of a respectful but merciless dismantling, but such critiques are, and mean to be, themselves within the tradition. In short, these books are helpful only on the simple working assumption that human questions--though not, of course, their answers--are so continuously transformed as to remain fundamentally the same now, then, and for all time. If that is false, the study of these books--and indeed any book not written here and now--is a mere antiquarian amusement. I should add an observation essential to the enterprise: the acknowledgment that there are perennial questions is the very antithesis of the claim that such questions have no answer--a presumptuous supposition which implies that one has seen deeply enough into the well of things to know that it has no bottom.

One chief characteristic of these works is that they are original in both senses of the term: very much the author's own product and very much at the beginning and origin of an intellectual development. Such texts differ from text books by communicating the order and the difficulties of discovery rather than delivering prepared packets of knowledge. Hence, precisely by reason of their originality, they imply a certain arrangement of studies, or, better, they obviate the principal organizational

features of modern university studies, which is the department corresponding to a field of study.

The department is the expression of a thoroughgoing intellectual prejudgment, namely, the Baconian division of the intellectual world into parcels of ground, fields, areas, within which can occur that concentrated cultivation, that intensive specialization, and that well-defined research, which make possible the advancement of learning and the accumulation of intellectual products. Without attempting here to sketch out the intellectual revolution which made such a division of labor possible and profitable, let me simply say that this college, as an undergraduate teaching institution, is willing to forgo all its advantages for the sake of radical reflection. For us, students "make an original contribution" when they go, for themselves, to the origin of things. We want them not so much to think something new, as to think anew, not so much to discover truths for the world as for themselves.

These books, then, in their originality, precede the fixing of the divisions of studies. In the language of hindsight, in them philosophy is not yet one of many equal specialties, poetry is still a source of wisdom, physics and theology are still continuous. Hence the reading of authors involves fewer assumptions than the study of fields and permits the more natural pursuit of those questions otherwise so frustratingly formulated as "interdisciplinary."

The order in which the books are read is by and large chronological. This observation of the given order again embodies a minimum of prejudgment. In addition, it makes obvious sense for the student to have read what the author has read. As Hegel knew his Aristotle or Milton his Homer or Stravinsky his Bach, so, perhaps, ought the student. In certain, though by no means all, cases it is even indispensable to be so prepared.

Contrary to appearance, this temporal order is not intended to have anything to do with the "history of ideas," or, indeed, with any kind of history understood as the discipline of interpreting events insofar as they are past. We have no interest at all in having students learn how different happenings or notions have succeeded each other. Indeed, in distinction from every school I know of, we have no interest in the past whatsoever (though a good many of us are privately avid readers of history). The fact that some of these books are written by authors who happen to be physically dead is perfectly peripheral. For insofar as the books really do form a tradition, their matter has entered into the present. It has done so in at least two ways, which correspond to the two old senses of the word "tradition." It signifies a process of handing down, but also of traducing--of preservation, but also of subversion. Hence the matter of the older books is always there, either as an absorbed and digested element of the development or as the forgotten cause and motive of an antithetical formulation.

The attitude toward the books which the college tries to foster is one of respectful attention combined with vigorous independence. We demand such respect even for the small number of lesser or even shoddy books which we include not on their own account but for the influence they have had. This respectful listening and critical responsiveness are meant to be carried over into the communal exercise which seems to us most appropriate to the study of the tradition.

We call this institutional device the seminar and regard it as the central class of the college. It is a discussion group of no more than twenty students, which meets twice a week throughout the four years of the program on a set text. It is emphatically not intended as a rap session or an encounter group, or as some exercise in group dynamics. In fact, there is no manipulation

and no method which properly belongs to the seminar; on the contrary, the rule is the great Heraclitean saying "Listen not to me but to my speech." There is, however, a certain structure. There are two seminar leaders who alternate in asking an opening question. The object of having two is to prevent the unopposed profession of authoritative opinion and to encourage students to address each other rather than the teacher. Every member of the seminar is expected to contribute to the discussion and to do so responsibly, responsively, and civilly--all members use a formal mode of address. The seminar may work at explicating the text or attempt to determine the truth. These two and a half hours can be vapid and they can be vigorous, silly or sublime, rambling, sequential, hilarious, serious. In accordance with the ancient discovery that speculative loquacity flourishes after dark, the seminars are held at night. Juniors and seniors are given a ten-week break in the middle of the year to join the only elective class, the preceptorial. It is a small study group on a book or a theme, offered by a tutor and chosen by the student.

Arts

Our second approach to reflective inquiry is through the liberal arts. The liberal arts are traditionally, and, I think, rationally, divided into the arts concerning speech and the arts concerning learnable objects, that is, the medieval trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and the quadrivium (four grades of mathematics and natural science).

The arts of language and of mathematics are root skills. By adapting the way of these arts, the college hopes to overcome, without resorting to the surveys and samplings of "general education," the vexed question concerning what fields of study the institution should offer and which of these a student should be allowed to avoid. As I understand this question, it has, from

the pedagogical point of view, two aspects. First, a modern university offers numerous wonderfully ingenious and equipotent studies among which young students have scarcely any way of choosing but by mere and unmatured preference. It also harbors certain dubious offerings, advertised in the language of pifflelland, which the same student has hardly any way of exposing but by bitter and expensive experience. Hence the choice of goods and the avoidance of trash pose an equally baffling problem to young learners, one whose acuteness increases with their obliviousness of its existence. Second, the serious studies usually require of those committed to them steeply increasing sophistication and specialization, and it is not clear that such learning is, in the language of education psychology, transferable; indeed, it often seems that a high degree of early specialization depresses rather than raises both the students' willingness and ability to bring learning to bear widely.

The arts, on the other hand, are eminently transferable, for although they are always wedded to a definite matter--the grammar is, say, French grammar and the mathematics is, say, projective geometry--the skill and the matter together can be continuously elaborated and adapted to any use. What is more, they are eminently defensible as required subjects for their own sake, for they are by nature elementary, and that means that, aside from the boon of their general accessibility, they display an inviting combination of simplicity and depth. At least our students seem to be won by some such quality when they get absorbed, for instance, in the mysteries of the copula is and why a certain type of Greek sentence can do without it, or again, when they recover the mental leap which leads from the naive to the formal meaning of the mathematical limit notion. Indeed, the mark of the elementary is that its interest is inexhaustible: in the mode of inquiry, nothing is ever "too elementary."

Once more the use of the arts in the program serves to avoid prejudgments. For these arts are antecedent, both in time and in thought, to the debilitating split between the humanities and the sciences which dominates modern schools. The skills of the trivium and the quadrivium involve continuous and complementary human abilities: it is not only that the art of mathematics can be most humane and the art of language ought to be very precise, but also that the elements of both are rooted in one and the same human power, the power of thought. Furthermore, the arts help us avoid the necessity for those "methods of analysis" courses with which schools attempt to reintroduce some sort of generality into their studies. We want to circumvent them because each such method embodies an enormous amount of intellectual preparation which students are scarcely sophisticated enough to discern. For example, the tremendous intellectual predeterminations involved in the application of quantitative methods to the social sciences can hardly become perspicuous to students unless they have thoroughly reflected on the nature of quantity and the process of quantification itself--one of the very intentions of our mathematical program which can, however, scarcely be achieved without some detailed but reflective study of pure mathematics.

In accordance with the twofold way of the arts, the program provides for two kinds of day classes called tutorials: a language tutorial and a mathematics tutorial. These are recitation classes, most of which meet four times a week, and they are devoted to various exercises, above all to translation and demonstration.

The language tutorial uses translation as the chief learning device. The languages studied and used are Greek and French. An ancient language is useful to us precisely because it is "dead," that is to say, completely fixed and literary. Greek in particular is chosen first, because it is, in illuminating contrast to

English, a highly inflected language; next, because of its intimate relation to our seminar readings; again, because of its literary riches; and, finally, because most of the faculty has quite shamelessly fallen in love with it. The choice of French is a little more arbitrary. German or Russian might do as well, although it is argued that French poetry, in its artfulness, best lends itself to rhetorical analysis. The work of the language tutorial almost always begins with some sort of translation exercise.

The object of the tutorial is, above all, to reflect on the relation of language to thought, of the languages to each other, of correctness to persuasiveness, of logic to grammar, of form to meaning. It is, secondly, to support the seminar by a slower and more detailed reading of some of the central passages of seminar books, and, last (though, by our own intention, least), it is to learn the language in question, for without some concrete medium, the discussion would be mere hot air. Hence the tutorial always, and sometimes rather inefficiently, shifts back and forth between the necessary rote learning and the desired reflection, the more so since language, unlike mathematics, cannot be learned by advancing in a linear sequence from agreed beginnings to desired conclusions; it has no clear given "elements."

The mathematics tutorial is apparently the pedagogically most successful part of the program, and, many of us think, the most gratifying to teach.

First of all, it ought to be said that in the tutorials, the injunction against the use of textbooks is of necessity somewhat relaxed. As it happens, the most appropriate beginning mathematics textbook is also a work of originality and subtlety: Euclid's Elements. All freshmen begin their mathematical studies with a consideration of its first definition: "A point is that

which has no part," and they end up, four years later, with the four-dimensional geometry of Einstein's special theory of relativity.

On the way, they study mostly original texts. It may seem surprising that in so unquestionably progressive a study as mathematics and mathematical physics (the tutorial includes both, especially astronomy), the original sources are good teaching tools. But suppose one thinks of it in this way: Einstein, in the famous 1905 paper which sets out special relativity, explicitly presupposes a knowledge of Maxwell's work. Maxwell cannot be understood without Newton. Newton, in his own phrase, "stands on the shoulders" of Kepler and Galileo. Galileo advocates Copernicus's system. Copernicus revolutionizes the Ptolemaic cosmos. Ptolemy's theorems cite Apollonius's Conics and Apollonius is inaccessible without the Elements of Euclid. These are, in reverse order, some of the very texts used in the tutorial. Seen in this light, the so-called "genetic" approach makes immediate sense.

And yet, regarded as textbooks, these works are often cumbersome and complicated. They are frequently not conducive to efficient learning and technical proficiency. But, then, it is not our object to train productive or problem-solving mathematicians, though we acknowledge and want all the benefits usually attributed to mathematical studies: precision of thought, logically valid reasoning, the power of demonstration, and an appreciation of intellectual elegance. Once again, however, the chief aim is reflection on the nature of mathematics and the possibility of its application to nature. And for that the original texts as almost indispensable, providing only they are not approached in the spirit of the history of science, that is, as repositories of past and surpassed forms of thought. Instead, we look to them as setting out both enduring intellectual

acquisitions and accounts of the revolution of intention and understanding which accompany their continual displacement and absorption--rarely refutation--by subsequent discoveries. In particular, we follow with fascinated care the development of mathematical structures from those humanly immediate objects of the natural intellect which engage the ancients to the sophisticated high-level abstractions of the constructive reason which preoccupy the moderns. This implied view--that the ancients and the moderns are at once separated and connected by a deep intellectual rupture whose thorough apprehension is crucial to the understanding of modernity--is perhaps the one substantial interpretative dogma built into the program.

For three years, a full fourth of the students' time goes into the laboratory. It is a most problematic, and yet an absolutely essential, part of the program. While the tutorial and the seminar take off from written texts, the laboratory is concerned with what its early modern proponents, eager to assimilate the direct study of nature to respectable learning, called the book of nature. But, at the same time, they also spoke of putting nature to the test of torture to extract her secrets. Contained in this figure of speech is the necessity for a laboratory, literally a workshop, in which strange tools are used--instruments not of production but of contemplation, instruments of observation and measurement. Close and careful study of the appearances was certainly practiced among the ancients, but the elaborately prepared and controlled kind of experience which marks the central device of the laboratory, namely, the experiment, is peculiar to the moderns. That is why this class is a separate and problematic exercise in a program devoted to interpretative reading.

Pedagogically, too, the laboratory has its special difficulties. The first function of the experiment is the deter-

mination of new truths of nature. In asking students to repeat experiments, albeit crucial ones, we run the danger of mounting a deliberately rickety reenactment with unrevealing results, or of getting slick reconfirmations of predetermined laws. Add to this the necessity, in more sophisticated experiments, of using the notorious "black box," the instrument whose insides are a dark mystery to the user, and it will be obvious how hard it can be to engender and maintain thoughtful excitement in this class.

Our aims are clear enough. We want to reflect on that enormously powerful activity called science which has arrogated to itself the name of knowledge simply; to think about the changes in meaning that the word "phenomenon" has undergone, from the ancient injunction to astronomy to "save the appearances" to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle; to consider the term "hypothesis"--for example, to understand what Newton means when he announces, "I make no hypotheses"; to understand how nature must be transformed to undergo mathematization, to think about time as the beat of the soul and the reading of a clock, to study force considered as acting at a distance and as a field, to understand energy in its continuities and discontinuities, to ask what life is, and so on and on. I might add that the problem of "scientific method," much beloved of philosophers of science, seems somehow to fade away before the brilliance of original natural inquiry.

The actual laboratory sequence remains somewhat fluid even after thirty years of practice, mostly on account of the embarrassment of riches from which to choose. At present, it begins in the freshman year with the observation and classification of living things and the atomic constitution of matter, that is, roughly, biology and chemistry. These subjects are taken up again in the senior year and pursued beyond the threshold of ordinary observation as molecular biology and quantum mechanics.

In between, there is a year of classical physics. Wherever possible, the preparatory readings are original papers, from Aristotle to Monod, from Galileo to Schroedinger.

In the sophomore year, a music tutorial replaces the laboratory. Music is traditionally the coping stone of the liberal arts, the juncture of the theoretic with the fine arts and even with theology. Here mathematics becomes qualitative in the ratios which govern consonances; here grammar becomes passionate in the tone relations which constitute a musical rhetoric.

The music tutorial is generally regarded as the most difficult class to teach, because, our fond dogma to the contrary, previous preparation and talent are necessary to the tutor and make disturbing distinctions among the students. We do require all freshmen to sing together in the chorus and to learn some musical notation, but that is not quite adequate.

The music class begins with the elements of music. The theory of proportions, which has been studied in the mathematics tutorial, is applied to the construction of the Western, diatonic scale, and rhythm, melody, and harmony are taken up. Then musical texts are subjected to detailed analytic listening, partly in preparation for the seminar, which includes a number of musical works. One example is Bach's St. Matthew Passion. The seminar might respond to the fact that Bach was a learned theologian by asking how the arias of the musical passion comment on the Gospel text--an inquiry for which the music tutorial has provided the preparation.

Finally, all members of the college are expected to attend one formal weekly lecture on any subject, which is given by a visitor or a tutor, and is followed by a (sometimes interminable) question period in which the mood ranges from puppy-dog aggression to deep cooperative probing. This exercise in listening and responding to connected discourse is quite important, especially

for students who are so much called on to engage in conversation.

It goes without saying that we have various special devices for examining students beyond their daily performance and for reporting to them our opinion of their work. The most important formal test is the senior essay, which is intended to be a work of reflection rather than research; these essays vary in quality from dispiriting to exhilarating.

Two last observations on the program as a whole: first, because of the many factors that have to be juggled, the integration of the parts is in stretches so loose as to be hardly discernible. Happily, there are other occasions when it is satisfyingly patent, when the tutorials, laboratory, and seminar immediately and essentially bear on each other. The details of the schedule of studies and their relations are set out in the catalogue of the college, a frequently revised document to whose authority we attach great importance.

And, finally, it should be emphasized that we do not consider the program a separable method of teaching, equally applicable to any subject matter, but rather as a plan to address certain questions which peculiarly imply this way of learning.

The Community of Learning

It remains to say something of the community of learning in which this program is realized, that is, the students, the faculty, and, briefly, the administration.

First, our students. We have always maintained that the program is intended for students of widely varying intellectual capacities, and that there is no distinctive St. John's student. Since our progress is stepwise and patient and almost all the work is elementary, there should be few parts that are technically beyond anyone's range. Indeed, a slow and naive student may well contribute more searching questions than a quick and

sophisticated one. We find that except for occasional sad cases, self-selection is the best guarantee of aptitude; the desire to learn outweighs questions of talent. Our students, consequently, should, and do, come from everywhere--as they end up doing practically anything. As it turns out, they in fact perform so very well on the standard national tests (in which we, nonetheless, place little faith) as to make the college appear far more selective than we intend it to be. There is, moreover, good corroboration that the program is indeed universally accessible. It comes from our Graduate Institute in Liberal Education, a summer version of the program intended in the main for schoolteachers. Our graduate students, who teach in large part in inner-city schools, whose academic training is usually neither very recent nor, often, very good, and who are preoccupied with urgent practical problems, take to the program with great gusto and gratifying success.

The faculty, on the other hand, has undeniably over the course of time grown into a certain distinctiveness, which is largely the consequence of the one circumstance we have most difficulty in explaining to the academic world. Just as we expect the students to study the whole program, so we expect ourselves to teach it. Naturally, not everyone has done every part of the program, but it <u>is</u> an aim to be attained, though over decades. It means constant new learning, sitting in on each other's classes, phoning for help. It sometimes means being only hours ahead of the students. But I think, on the whole, it makes us better teachers, closer to the students' difficulties and more apt to find the most revealing way out. What characterizes the faculty is, therefore, a certain proud shamelessness about admitting ignorance and engaging in public learning. One way to describe this group might be to say that it is recalcitrantly unacademic: No departmental politics--we form, if you like, one

large department. No imperial references to "my field" or "my century" or "my material"--we have a common subject, the program. No pride of competence or rank--our single rank and title is tutor, that is to say, "guardian" of learning. In spite of royal battles over matters of principle and gently simmering personal animosities, the faculty engages in continuous common study and conversation. When I say "faculty," I include our administrators. Our deans are, according to the college policy, chosen from among the tutors, and the other administrators, including the president, have always (as much as they could) joined in the learning and the teaching--a circumstance of incalculable value to the college. I think that most of us would say that this happy collegiality is simply a reflection of the integrity of the program.

This, then, is a sketch of the plan and the people that constitute St. John's College. Now might be the moment to ask why a community should feel entitled to devote itself to the kind of inquiry I have described. I think our communal answer--briefly formulable but not briefly defensible--might be that such activity is both the mark and the source of human excellence. And if we are told that that is all very well, but that there are more urgent and immediate tasks for a college, solid, realistic, practical aims, and if we are asked how we can, in good conscience, set them aside, we might answer with some counterquestions: Have any of those myriad accommodations to the times into which schools have been driven made education one whit more immediate to life? Have the educators' urgencies in any way made the student a better judge of right action? Is realism in education practical? Does it work? Ever?

II. Problems and Questions Concerning the Program

Of course rhetorical questions do not adequately dispose of the many difficulties raised about the college by friendly and

not-so-friendly observers, and most intensively by the faculty and the students themselves. Let me briefly list what seem to me the chief topics of debate, and indicate some first answers.

The Place of the Program in American Education

We are often asked, and have to ask ourselves, why St. John's College has not been more widely imitated, and of what use, beyond its own minuscule enterprise, it can be to American education if it is indeed inimitable. There have, in fact, been a number of programs modeled on ours, but, by and large, the departmental organization of American schools is simply too rigid to accommodate the radical modifications demanded by this program, while the propitious conjunction of factors necessary to a new founding is very rare. I think we should not yield to the implication that institutions that are good in themselves are not doing their social duty unless they are also exerting wide influence around them. Nonetheless, the college does have a wider role to play in American education; namely, as one distinctive point of reference: a self-confident but receptive center of debate, an established repository of experience, and a willing source of well-tested working devices for the restoration of the liberal arts.

The imputation of elitism is sometimes made in this context, but we must simply reject it. The program is intended for all literate human beings and most particularly for citizens of a republic--our style of learning is eminently participatory, and questions of political philosophy play a large role in the program. If smallness and intimacy is the sin, one might as well accuse the family of elitism. As for the expense of such an education, if the true costs of public, large-scale, higher education were ever honestly reckoned, this college, which has, as it were, only one single large department and no need for fancy hardware, might look quite good.

Finally, there is the problem of vocationalism, of preparation for careers. While a principled program must not accommodate itself to any passing national mood, still it is a fair question whether this kind of education is nothing but a respectable luxury on the educational scene. In fact, way over half of our students go on to graduate and professional schools, and they enter every conceivable profession, especially law and medicine. By their own report, after an initial disorientation, apparently comparable to that of Adam and Eve after their ejection from paradise, they find their years at the college both professionally and personally helpful to life in the world--though "helpful" is too bland a word for the effects of the program. It would be more candid to report that some students say they feel crippled by the habit of reflection they have acquired, while others--far more--claim that the world belongs to them as, they think, it does not quite belong to many of their peers, and they cite more widely applicable competence and better-developed critical power. But that the distinction which should, and often does, mark our graduates should appear very soon or very spectacularly, no one who has carefully considered the relation of learning to life could demand: our success may often come tardily and quietly, in the mature inner lives of our students.

The Omission of Certain Studies

One of the apparently inevitable questions at the orientation session which the Instruction Committee, the faculty group charged with the supervision of the program, has with the incoming freshmen is: Why do we study no Eastern books? The answer is threefold. First, four years barely suffice even to begin with our own Western tradition. Nothing worth doing could possibly happen in the time we might squeeze out. Second, it is by no means clear that the Eastern books can be fitted into a Western, academic, institutional framework without making a

travesty of them--that they do not demand to be approached within their own living discipline. Third, we have reason to distrust available translations, because by an undiscriminating use of metaphysical terminology, they seem so often to turn Eastern wisdom into a pale and unoriginal reflection of Western philosophy. In the case of Western texts, we are alert to the fact that translations will tend toward the higher gibberish, and we have the communal competence to counteract this difficulty--not so with Eastern works. We have similar hesitations about Islamic texts. It is not from disrespect but from the exact opposite motive that we omit these traditions.

The fact is that we have the greatest misgivings about the very notion of "encountering other cultures," especially as an undergraduate enterprise. Our deeper difficulty is with the concept of culture itself, which can, notoriously, include anything from menus to metaphysics. The more immediate pedagogical problem, however, concerns the idea of "encounter" or "exposure" or "acquaintance." Surely it is not safe to encounter strange ways when one is not yet solidly grounded in one's own, nor is it sound to approach alien traditions when one cannot afford to pursue them in depth and detail.

The other major omission of the program which is often questioned is that of history. Even observers who accept the fact that we do not study any of a number of other worthwhile fields wonder how we can read the texts without an "historical background." Our answer, far too abruptly stated, would be, first, that such capsule history conveys very little except a prejudgment, while original historical inquiry is prohibitively time-consuming, and, second, more importantly, that there is every evidence that the works we read are intended by their authors to be directly accessible and self-sufficient, and that this claim must be, at least to begin with, respected.

Study Modes of the Program

Our students seem to have little difficulty in accepting an all-required program which they have, after all, chosen, which has a fairly explicit rationale, and which has the adherence of their teachers. Indeed, they turn out to be the most orthodox defenders of the program against the inroads of elective elements, most of all because it assures them of a community of conversation--they can all talk to each other about their work--which is the human realization of the intellectual coherence of their studies. What they do complain about is the lack of choice in tutors, since they are assigned to classes and discouraged from asking for transfers. It is a necessary hypothesis of the college community that all tutors are about equal in their ability to guide classes which do not, supposedly, depend so much on the teacher as on the text and the students. Of course, the hypothesis is not quite true; our classes depend a great deal on teachers, and, also, all the tutors are not equally competent and exciting; a few are not even very good teachers. This is one of the perennial problems of a college whose faculty thinks of itself as primarily a teaching faculty. The best that can be said is that we do agonize over the situation.

On our part, we worry about the amount of spoon-feeding and hand-holding our students absorb and wonder whether it strengthens them or unfits them for making choices and working independently. We are never quite sure what we ought to do in this respect.

Our students, again, tend to suspect us--sometimes with irritation and sometimes with a kind of intellectual frisson--of propagating some esoteric dogma through the classes. Nothing can resolve these suspicions except constant readiness on the part of the faculty to make explicit and to discuss the assumptions behind our studies, to make full philosophic disclosure.

An academic critic might question the complete absence of scholarship and research. Truth to tell, the students do not miss them, and they do get the benefit of their teacher's fuller attention. Perhaps there is some loss in the absence of ongoing intellectual productivity (though many of us do write quite a bit), but we comfort ourselves with the thought that there is something very timely indeed about our ambition to recollect and revivify our intellectual inheritance and our reluctance to join in the further accumulation of largely unabsorbed rational artifacts.

Finally, the scantiness of our contemporary readings is often criticized. I think that, like everybody else, we are simply embarrassed by the fragmented enormity of the material. We would excuse ourselves from fully resolving this difficulty by pointing out that the appreciation and critique of modernity, which is indeed one of our central preoccupations, is best initiated with the aid of earlier, more fundamental texts.

Institutional Difficulties

Pressure is the chief difficulty in realizing the program institutionally: the pressure of doing difficult daily preparation, the frustration of racing through extensive seminar assignments, the weariness of continuous involvement in that contradiction in terms, the scheduled conversation. We used to call the week between semesters "Dead Week." Tutors and students alike felt like zombies.

By way of relief, we have been slowly cutting down the program, shortening the readings, and giving ourselves some long weekends. But, oddly enough, the final fact of the matter seems to be that, endless complaints notwithstanding, people like it this way.

The one aspect of this problem that observers most often

notice is the relentless, strenuous intellectuality of the college. Again there is some relief in the art studio, the drama groups, and in amateur music. Also, students have the choice of being at the Western campus, which is said to be somewhat more relaxed. But the condition itself is not curable, since it is the consequence of a program that has no intention of educating "the whole person" (an enterprise which is part impertinence, part impossibility), but addresses itself mainly to what is self-aware, rational, and communicable, in sum, to what is traditionally called free in human beings. The faculty's contribution must be a great effort to insure that it is not a dry and brittle but a passionate and absorbing intellectuality that dominates the community. I should add that so intimate and intense a community, with its deep friendships and aggravated aversions, its trusted models and clay-footed idols, naturally, albeit obliquely, provides all its members with a moral education.

"Real Life"

Our students persistently bring to us a perplexity which we share, though more occasionally and less acutely. Who is there who spends his life with objects of thought and does not sometimes feel a panic fright that reality is not being reached, that life is going on, but elsewhere? Young students are especially vulnerable to such suspicions, because they are most afflicted with idealism, a propensity for pitching ideas too high for action and too shallow for truth. But the sporadic fear that thought and life are forever disjoined--which has nothing to do with such mundane worries as being prepared to make a living--is an endemic anxiety of any serious community of learning and particularly of St. John's College.

Now the ultimate relation of thought to things and theory to action is precisely one of those perennial questions of the

inquiring tradition with which we are incessantly preoccupied. Hence all we the faculty can immediately do is to urge melancholic students to engage in lots of sports (we have a lively and inclusive intramural program) and to refrain as much as possible from being mere intellectuals--I mean, people who stake out arid claims in a ghostly, self-sufficient environment of abstractions. Probably the best we can do is ourselves to show fairly unfailing trust, not to say faith, that thinking can reach the world and that learning is indeed possible.

THE OVEROPTIONED CURRICULUM

Gerald Grant

It was not at all clear fifty years ago that the United States would develop the internationally recognized system of research-oriented universities that, despite current afflictions, loom so large today on the academic landscape. It is easy to forget how fragile and uncertain was the early development of what has come to be called the multiversity. But recall that from the inception of the Nobel Prizes in 1901 until 1925, 103 Nobel Prizes were awarded (excluding the Peace Prize), and only two of these went to Americans--and one of the American laureates was a naturalized citizen. The Germans had won twenty-six (nine in physics, eight in chemistry, five in medicine and physiology, four in literature); the French, fifteen; Britain, thirteen; the Netherlands, five.

Yet, by 1925, major structural transformations had taken place. American scholars had not achieved a very exalted place by the standards of the world scientific community, but they had created a distinctively American university. Although it was heavily influenced by German models, it also built upon Scottish and English origins at the undergraduate level. But the American university was unique in its invention of the department and its responsiveness to democratic and utilitarian concerns, perhaps never expressed more clearly than by Ezra Cornell, who said, "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study."

As I write, I have the fall course catalogue of a major university before me. It lists several thousand course offerings: elementary linear algebra, stream sanitation, dynamics of nonviscous materials, ethics and value theory, advanced Russian, abnormal psychology, and welding for sculpture (pending the

university senate approval). What counts as higher education in America is still good for a snicker in the first circle at a London theatre (although English academics such as Sir Eric Ashby and A. H. Halsey have proved to be sympathetic critics as well). And our efforts to count nearly everybody as a potential or actual student have also been unmatched anywhere. No doubt at least some of the vibrancy of American intellectual and cultural life can be accounted for by the wide margins and highly permeable boundaries established around our universities.

The American university proved to be extraordinarily alloplastic. It added departments for animal husbandry and Celtic languages, marketing and linguistics. Alongside the traditional professions of law and medicine grew schools for other would-be professionals: teachers, nurses, forest rangers, journalists, librarians, accountants, and social workers. Experimental colleges in the 1960's that did away with academic rank (some unaware that St. John's had done it thirty years before them) were timid indeed when compared with the radical policy of including all these teachers of diverse subjects as professors in the same university--even if the title meant they only shared the faculty club and parking lot.

Revolution and Counterrevolution

Although differentials in pay sometimes favored the faculty in professional schools, higher status was accorded to the faculties in the core disciplines of the humanities, sciences, and social sciences, and their status in turn was increasingly defined in terms of visibility gained through research and publication rather than more locally defined prestige as a teacher and participant in the collegium. Judgments about research became the critical judgments in organizing the university, and as this function passed to expert peers within increasingly specialized disciplines, power passed from previously influential parties

(trustees and legislators, students, administrators, and religious denominations) to the scholarly guilds. It was this crescent hegemony of the academic professions over the earlier wielders of institutional power that Christopher Jencks and David Riesman signified by their book, The Academic Revolution.

As faculties trained in the research-oriented universities replaced more genteel scholars of an earlier era, the liberal arts college came more and more to resemble the value orientations the faculties had acquired during their graduate school socialization. This led to what David Riesman and I (in The Perpetual Dream: Reform and Experiment in the American College) have called a series of telic reforms or counterrevolution that attempted to renew or to create fresh visions of undergraduate education. By telic reforms, we meant to signify those reforms that emphasize ends and purposes that are different from, if not hostile to, the specialization and training in the dominant research universities. We identified four ideal-typical exemplars of the telic reforms: the neoclassical ideal at St. John's, the aesthetic expressive experiments at Bennington and Black Mountain, the activist-radical impulse that emerged in an earlier era at such labor colleges as Brookwood or the Highlander Folk School and in a later era at Antioch and the College for Human Services in New York, and, most recently, the communal expressive or therapeutic model that shaped the ethos at Johnston College at the University of Redlands and Kresge College at Santa Cruz.

These experiments in pure form generally took place in small institutions, but they created chains of influence that were quite large. For example, from the Committee on the Liberal Arts at Chicago and the neoclassical experiment at St. John's that grew from it, one could trace direct influences to at least a score of colleges. Although each of the two campuses of St. John's College was designed for a community of about four hundred students (which the faculty regarded as the upper limit beyond which a sense of

community would be injured), the St. John's ideal embodied a vision and fostered a dialectic in the culture. It has kept alive an ideal of the liberal arts and a concern for the wholeness of intellectual experience. Each of the telic reforms was passionate, and expressed a vision of how men should live by attempting to create that form of life in the interactions in both the curriculum and extracurriculum.

The influence of the telic reforms on the developing systems of higher education was limited. They were restricted by partial incorporation in the endlessly adaptable multiversity or, from the perspective of the telic reformers themselves, they were co-opted and corrupted. Within the multiversity today, the aesthetic expressives have gained a place in schools of fine arts or in new departments of synaesthetic education, activist radicals have infiltrated schools of social work and sociology, neoclassicals have come together to create experiments at Berkeley and a few other places, most of them short-lived. These forays have not generally succeeded in creating any new forms of general education or served to establish more coherent curricula on a large scale. Rather, the bundle of functions performed by the multiversity simply expanded; the telic reforms were "cooled out," to use Burton Clark's phrase in another context.

The Rise of Departments

The free choice elective systems that developed in the late nineteenth century were the means of dismantling the requirements of the liberal arts colleges. Electives were identified with liberty, better teaching, and the rise of desirable specialization. Students could exercise a blunt judgment about faculty quality by voting with their feet and research scholars could advance in their specialities if freed from the burdens of teaching the requirements of a fixed classical curriculum.

The rapid rise of the departmental structures in American universities can be explained as much by the American penchant for businesslike organization with its insistence on efficient span of control as by the logic of natural growth of knowledge. Gradually, the departments became the key power centers in the major universities, and by the 1950's, research professorships, elaborate systems of requirements and prerequisites, and systems of distribution requirements that were more akin to a political division of the spoils than to discussions of educational philosophy were prevalent.

Berkeley illustrates the general trend. In 1902, Berkeley required fifteen units of work in a single department. In the late 1940's, there were some countermoves against specialization, but these were defeated by the departments. By 1958, the collegiate "general" degree (i.e., a nondepartmental major) was eliminated at Berkeley and students were virtually forced to align with departments, which by then required a minimum of thirty hours and abolished the upper limits on the number of courses a student could take in any one area. As the departments controlled more and more of the student traffic and added courses and prerequisites, little of the curriculum was left unaffiliated. As Frederick Rudolph has pointed out, faculties were increasingly unable to make up their minds about how general an education should be but were quick to decide what would advance or retain the interests of their own department. Fewer and fewer faculty were liberally educated themselves in the rapid expansion of the 1950's and 1960's, but they insisted on higher and higher standards of performance within their specialized fields.

Reading lists for undergraduate courses in the more selective colleges and universities began to look more like specialist bibliographies hopelessly beyond the range of the average or even the superior student. Anxieties grew among students about always being "behind."

As enrollments doubled and then quadrupled, many colleges became more selective. Whereas only a few-score colleges even bothered to require students to take the nationally standardized Scholastic Aptitude Tests in the 1940's, by the mid-1960's, more than seven hundred did so. A study by Kenneth M. Wilson demonstrates that students who submitted to increasing academic pressures were required at the peak of college selectivity in the early 1960's to do more work for less reward. That is, at selective colleges, as better students were admitted, grades remained constant; in other words, students were doing more and better work for relatively less reward in terms of grades--in effect, grade deflation. Although Wilson's sample was restricted to a small group of women's colleges, I suspect the galling phenomenon of reducing "pay" while intensifying both the work and the competition was widespread among selective institutions before the onset of campus protests. These meritocratic resentments contributed to the formation of what might be called the pedagogic left, which developed parallel to and often overlapped with more consciously political protest movements of the 1960's. These connections were complex and perhaps still not fully understood. What is clear is that frustrated students, often veterans of the civil rights movements, started to oppose the war. Finding that a nearly intractable enterprise, they began to turn on the universities as readier targets (for it seemed that they, too, were part of the war machine--in ranking students for draft deferments, in providing ROTC training, or aiding the war effort through research that began to be seen as complicitous). It was very early in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement that its leaders discovered the propagandistic value of an attack on the "multiversity," which became laden with pejorative overtones as it came to be seen as an additional device for mobilizing students and delegitimizing institutional authority. What began as a tactic soon acquired a life of its own, and a movement of the pedagogic

left began, with faculty as well as student adherents. Often it merged with the political left--as both later did in some measure with the counterculture, which sought to substitute the values of camaraderie, personal authenticity, and sometimes hedonism for those of competition and formal campus authority.

Only a small proportion of students and faculty ever spent their time in protest meetings even on the more agitated campuses. Yet even a small proportion on a large base can be a sizable and threatening number, particularly if, as was true, they were willing to take extreme measures. While much of the public at large was repulsed, the institutions themselves often proved pliable. Faculty could not stop the war, but they could grant many concessions in the curriculum. And since faculties themselves were often split violently on the war as well as on the proper response to antiwar tactics by student invaders, some hoped that a relaxation in the curriculum would bring peace in the way that parents who are close to divorce are likely to relax their demands on protesting children.

These concessions did not take place as a formal quid pro quo but in parallel and sometimes almost unconscious fashion in a nation in which many forms of authority between the young and their elders had seriously eroded if not collapsed. Students became members of boards of trustees (a 1970 Carnegie survey of 1,230 colleges and universities found that 58 percent had given students more control over academic policy), drafted reports for educational reform, and campaigned ceaselessly for alterations in the established ways of conducting academic business. Many requirements evaporated, either piecemeal or through large-scale demolition. Parental regulations disappeared with such speed that it is a surprise to come upon a college that still forbids co-residential living. Students were given more freedom to pick and choose their way through the curriculum. College catalogues nearly doubled in a decade to accommodate not only new

specialities but also pressure groups that demanded black and other ethnic studies, women's studies, and environmental studies. While these changes were proceeding inside existing institutions, new colleges and universities were founded, many of which abolished traditional departments and emphasized interdisciplinary programs or contract-based individualized learning. They had effects from the outside as they attracted students and faculty--for America is the only nation in the world in which institutions compete quite so blatantly for students and where obsolescence in any form has always been feared.

The Overoptioned Curriculum

In limited space, one can only highlight the influences that produced the overoptioned curriculum. It was a period in which every aspect of college and university life was called into question. Never was there so much discussion of educational policy in terms of admissions standards, the curriculum, and who was to control it. The most widespread and significant impact of the educational upheaval of the '60's was to bring about a considerably greater degree of autonomy for students. They were free to plan their courses of study in a way they had never been before. Almost everywhere requirements were relaxed and the paths toward a degree were made more multiple and open. A 1972 survey of academic deans in 115 selective colleges and universities showed that three-fourths of these institutions permitted students to plan their courses of study and define their majors (21 percent of the institutions had students do so frequently; 52 percent said this was occasional practice). Eighty-three percent of the colleges granted credit for individual work or study away from the campus; 22 percent allowed such work to count for up to one-quarter of the credits required for a degree; 9 percent gave credit for such study even when pursued in the absence of faculty supervision. Three-fifths of these selective colleges allowed

students to initiate their own courses. More significantly, 28 percent permitted undergraduates to conduct their own courses for credit.

Not all colleges abolished fixed requirements; some maintained varieties of earlier core curricula and kept tighter rein on students who wished to petition out of them. But a careful survey at the University of Michigan showed that the changes from 1967 to 1974 were widespread at less selective campuses as well. General education requirements dropped from 43 to 33 percent of a student's course load. There was a marked decline in such basic requirements as math and foreign languages. Less than one-fifth of all institutions in the sample required any mathematics for the bachelor's degree. Examination of transcripts in those years showed that students used their increased elective power not to substitute other broad-gauged requirements in the liberal arts but to concentrate more heavily in one area. Students who were given complete freedom often followed a program that was a variation of a single theme. Often the resulting concentration was very skewed, with many courses in a particular interest area, such as population control, or heavy emphasis in one corner of a discipline, such as courses on Maslow, Rogers, and other humanistic psychologists, with very little awareness of the broader map of cognitive, experimental, and social psychology.

Limits to Formlessness?

Reactions to these occurrences have led to a renewed concern for coherence in the curriculum. Yet the causes are so deep and the changes so pervasive that I am not optimistic about the possibility of deep structural changes on the level, say, of the reform that Scott Buchanan led at St. John's in 1937. Although many faculties have begun to tighten some requirements and to discuss the possibilities of new core programs, the forces that have produced the amorphous and overoptioned curricula remain

strong. In a day of declining enrollments, the fear of losing student customers in a competitive market will prove a powerful institutional brake to serious curricular reform. There are few limits to amorphousness in terms of what the culture demands. One does not have to read Moby Dick or any other text to be considered educated in America. That nineteenth-century dynamo, Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, still speaks for many as he did in opposing even the modest distribution requirements that Cornell introduced at the turn of the century when he admitted he was "fundamentally a complete skeptic as to the necessity of any subject whatever as an element in the education of a gentleman and a scholar." Of course, Eliot spoke at a time when a high school graduate could be presumed to know some Latin, mathematics, history, and perhaps even a little Greek. Today the relaxed curriculum has spread downward to the high schools, which now offer many of the freedoms and escape routes common at the university.

Nor are there many limits on the spreading formlessness in terms of what employers will demand. With the exception of the high-status professions and some technical areas, it is the raw credential that counts, not the content or, at entry level at least, the intellectual skills. No one pays much attention to whether an American graduate has had mathematics or history, let alone inquire whether someone is liberally educated. We are, and for more than a century have been, democrats of the curriculum.

Some limit does seem to be approaching in terms of what it is that parents and taxpayers will pay for. In a nation in which the costs of higher education--increasingly at public rather than private expense--threaten to swamp ability to pay, there are many calls for greater accountability. This has led to concern for minimum testing and so-called competence-based curricula at all levels of education, including the college level. Whether such efforts lead to behaviorist monstrosities or to more coherent and even liberal forms of education remains to be seen.

The problem, I believe, is not to impose "coherence" or to find a new curricular pattern that can be widely emulated, but in many ways and at many places to regenerate a serious dialogue that constitutes the experience of a liberal education for the faculty themselves as they search for ways to restore it to the undergraduate curriculum. It does not mean adopting the St. John's program or following Harvard's lead. It means asking important questions in many different places, and following the questions where they lead.

REPORT ON THE CORE CURRICULUM

Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University

Background

Shortly after assuming the presidency of Harvard University, Derek Bok turned his attention to undergraduate education. His Annual Report for 1971-72 noted much vitality, diversity, and strength in the students and faculty of the college. But he also observed that there was no general understanding at Harvard--or indeed at other American colleges--of what young men and women could expect to gain from a liberal arts education.

Almost all liberal arts curricula since the early years of this century have been organized according to principles of depth and breadth which encourage students to acquire a solid grasp of one subject and broad exposure to a variety of other fields. At mid-century, breadth was provided by requiring courses that surveyed the three main divisions of knowledge (humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences), and offered a grounding in the traditions and culture of Western civilization. But in the last decade or more, this curricular pattern has seemed inadequate or inappropriate. Colleges now serve an extraordinarily diverse body of students; knowledge has proliferated immensely and familiar lines of demarcation have broken down; there is a growing interest in the history and problems of non-Western countries and peoples. These currents have made it increasingly difficult to agree upon a body of knowledge that could be considered essential to the education of undergraduates, and they have called into question the structure of the traditional liberal arts curriculum.

In the summer of 1973, President Bok appointed a new dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, who immediately set out to

clarify the educational goals of Harvard College. As the first step in initiating a broad review of the college, Dean Henry Rosovsky published, in October 1974, a "Letter to the Faculty on Undergraduate Education." This letter outlined the problems of undergraduate education at Harvard, many of them the result of more than twenty-five years of unsystematic, piecemeal change in requirements and the curriculum. It called upon the faculty to join in the effort to redefine the aims and methods of liberal education.

In the following months, well over one hundred faculty members, and scores of students, responded to the dean's statement; almost all agreed with Rosovsky's critique of the status quo. The following spring, Dean Rosovsky appointed seven task forces to study different aspects of the college.* The Task Force on the Core Curriculum, chaired by Professor James Q. Wilson, was charged with determining what, if any, intellectual experiences and skills should be required of all students, regardless of their field of concentration, and how the college might best fulfill its obligation to provide a liberal education. This task force issued a preliminary report in the fall of 1976. Recommending a set of nonconcentration requirements keyed to specific educational goals, it examined and rejected arguments for the principal curricular alternatives: an expansion of electives; greater emphasis on preprofessional or vocational training; or continuation of vaguely defined distribution requirements. The so-called Wilson Report made the case for a mandatory Core Curriculum based not on some theoretical division of hier-

*Separate task forces were appointed to study the composition of the student body, college life, advising and counseling, pedagogical improvement, educational resources, concentrations, and the Core Curriculum.

archical ordering of knowledge, but rather on "distinctive ways of thinking that are identifiable and important." It offered a provisional statement of requirements in eight areas.

The Wilson Report was widely discussed in the spring of 1977. The Faculty Council (steering committee of the faculty) prepared legislation incorporating the basic recommendation while altering and consolidating the provisional statement of requirements. In May 1977, the faculty voted by a considerable majority to reaffirm its commitment to nonconcentration requirements and to proceed, through five faculty committees, to a more detailed and specific set of recommendations.

These committees met during 1977-78, first separately, then as a committee of the whole under the chairmanship of Dean Rosovsky. The Report on the Core Curriculum, finally submitted to the faculty in April 1978, contained sections on the rationale of the Core and its relation to the remainder of the undergraduate curriculum. Defining a standard of intellectual breadth, it emphasized basic modes of understanding that are important in the contemporary world. In accordance with the principles and guidelines outlined below, the faculty voted to establish a Core Curriculum requirement and a Standing Committee to implement it over a four-year period, beginning in the fall of 1979. This document is an edited version of the Report on the Core Curriculum; it incorporates modifications called for in the faculty legislation.

I. Purpose of the Core Curriculum

In his Annual Report for 1975-76, Dean Rosovsky attempted to state what it means to be an educated person in the latter part of the twentieth century. The standard that he outlined provided the context for the review of undergraduate education at Harvard, including the development of the Core Curriculum. The elements of

this standard, which broadly outline the educational goals of the college, were as follows.

1. An educated person must be able to think and write clearly and effectively.

2. An educated person should have achieved depth in some field of knowledge. Cumulative learning is an effective way to develop a student's powers of reasoning and analysis, and for our undergraduates this is the principal role of concentrations.

3. An educated person should have a critical appreciation of the ways in which we gain and apply knowledge and understanding of the universe, of society and of ourselves. Specifically, he or she should have an informed acquaintance with the aesthetic and intellectual experience of literature and the arts; with history as a mode of understanding present problems and the processes of human affairs; with the concepts and analytic techniques of modern social science; and with the mathematical and experimental methods of the physical and biological sciences.

4. An educated person is expected to have some understanding of, and experience in thinking about, moral and ethical problems. It may well be that the most significant quality in educated persons is the informed judgment which enables them to make discriminating moral choices.

5. Finally, an educated American, in the last third of this century, cannot be provincial in the sense of being ignorant of other cultures and other times. It is no longer possible to conduct our lives without reference to the wider world within which we live. A crucial difference between the educated and the uneducated is the extent to which one's life experience is viewed in wider contexts.

The first goal, that our students learn to communicate with precision, cogency, and force, is addressed by the requirement in Expository Writing, and reinforced throughout the curriculum. The second goal, depth of knowledge in a particular field, is accomplished through the requirement that students concentrate a substantial portion of their work in a single subject. The importance and value of concentration was reaffirmed by both the Task Force on the Core Curriculum and the Task Force on Concentrations.

The third, fourth, and fifth goals are met specifically through the Core Curriculum. Its purpose is to assure that all

students, regardless of their special field of concentration, acquire the knowledge, skills, and habits of thought that the faculty believes to be of general and lasting intellectual significance. Broadly stated, the goal of the Core is to encourage a critical appreciation of the major approaches to knowledge, so that students may acquire an understanding of what kinds of knowledge exist in certain important areas, how such knowledge is created, how it is used, and what it might mean to them personally. We seek, in other words, to have students acquire basic literacy in major forms of intellectual discourse.

To this end, we have established requirements in five areas. Requirements in Literature and the Arts will acquaint students with important literary and artistic achievements and will aim to develop a critical understanding of how man gives artistic expression to his experience of the world. History requirements will focus on major aspects of the present world viewed in historical perspective and will attempt to lead students to an understanding of the complexity of human affairs in specific situations in the past. Requirements in Social Analysis and Moral Reasoning introduce central concepts and ideas in these intellectual realms and will develop students' abilities to think systematically about fundamental aspects of individual and social life in contemporary society. Science requirements will acquaint students with basic principles of the physical, biological, and behavioral sciences and with science as a way of looking at man and the world. Finally, a Foreign Cultures requirement is designed to expand the student's range of cultural experience and to provide fresh perspectives of his or her own cultural assumptions and traditions. This aim may be achieved through appropriate Core courses in Literature and the Arts, History, or Social Analysis, or in special courses in Foreign Cultures. The intention here is not only to avoid an exclusive focus on Western

traditions, but also to expose students to the essential and distinctive features of foreign cultures, whether Western or non-Western.

These different areas of the Core Curriculum are linked by a common question: How do we gain and apply knowledge and understanding of the universe, of society, and of ourselves? The underlying purpose of the Core is to set a minimum standard of intellectual breadth for our students. Yet the Core is not meant to stand alone. Fulfilling Core requirements will consume the equivalent of about one academic year, as did the previous General Education requirement. Concentration requirements will continue to involve the equivalent of about two years of academic work. Students will retain the equivalent of one academic year for electives, within which they can express their own priorities by initiating or advancing selected aspects of their intellectual development. Conjoined with these electives and work in the field of concentration, the Core will provide a solid and shared base of general and liberal education for all of our students.

It is also important to note what is not intended in the Core Curriculum. We have not established an identical set of courses for all students, or an even-handed introduction to all fields of knowledge. The proliferation of knowledge and the diversity of our students make both of these goals impractical. We do not think there is a single set of Great Books that every educated person must master, and we do not think an inevitably thin survey of the traditional subject areas--humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences--is any longer useful. Nor do we think a loose distribution requirement among departmental courses can accomplish the educational priorities that we have identified. Finally, the Core Curriculum is not intended as a model for higher education in general. We do not believe all colleges should perform the same function or offer the same

curriculum; indeed, we are dismayed by the uniformity that has come to characterize much of higher education. Our purpose is to provide the best possible education for our own students. If we are successful, others may benefit as well, but this is a secondary consideration.

II. The Core Requirement

The Core Program establishes requirements in five areas. Detailed guidelines for the courses in each area are as follows.

Area 1. Literature and the Arts

Characteristics of the Courses. The common aim of these courses is to foster a critical understanding of how man gives artistic expression to his experience of the world. Through the examination of selected major works, students will be expected to develop and refine skills of reading, seeing, and hearing; to apprehend the possibilities and limitations of the artist's chosen medium and the means available for expression; to understand the complex interplay between individual talent, artistic tradition, and historical context. In the requirement for this area, the written word takes precedence over other forms of artistic expression to the extent that the study of literature is required of all students, while a choice is offered between music and fine arts.

The Requirement. One half-course in literature (A), one half-course in fine arts or music (B), and one half-course dealing with humanistic culture in its broader context (C). Certain courses in Area 1 will also be designated as meeting the requirement in Area 5 (Foreign Cultures).

A. Literature. Students will choose one half-course from a specified group of courses created or adapted for the Core Curriculum. Each course will examine major texts in a specific

genre. This organizing principle has been chosen in the belief that formal coherence will provide added depth and dimension. The courses will aim to convey an understanding of particular modes of apprehending and articulating experience; they are not intended to be solely studies in the history of a genre. What lies behind the vision of comedy or the vision of tragedy? What are the aspirations that inform the world of epic or the world of romance? What are the inherent attitudes in the pastoral that have attracted authors to it at certain moments in history? How is poetry capable of conveying aspects of experience which prose is not? These are the kinds of questions to be addressed. We assume that in dealing with such questions students will be exposed to a variety of critical approaches, but the primary purpose of Core literature courses is to show how great authors have contrived distinctive statements about timeless and universal aspects of human experience.

B. Fine Arts or Music. Students will choose one half-course, either in fine arts or in music, from a specified group of courses. All courses will incorporate instruction in the elements of visual or aural "literacy"; it is expected that this can be done through direct exposure to the works of major artists.

i. Fine Arts. Courses will focus on major works of art, artists, and sites, and emphasize questions of visual form and expression. Such courses will seek to develop the capacity to make discriminating judgments and to promote understanding of the relationship between art and the culture in which it is produced. Courses may explore one or more of the media of art and ordinarily will involve a comparison of the differing approaches and products of artists in different times and places.

ii. Music. Each course will attempt to convey a critical understanding of musical works of art by exploring a

topically defined range of music. Courses will seek to develop in students a sensitivity to the elements of musical sound and their formal integration. In order to discern the means by which major composers achieved their masterpieces, students should acquire some familiarity with the rudiments of musical language such as rhythm, melody, and harmony; with basic principles of compositional technique and fundamental concepts of musical form; with the properties of various vocal and instrumental performance media; with the development of musical styles; and with the relevance of social and historical contexts. Courses will emphasize some aspects of analysis more than others, but above all else, students are to acquire an informed awareness of musical styles, structure, and ideas.

C. Contexts of Culture. In addition to half-courses in fields A and B, students will choose one half-course from a specified group of "Contexts" courses. The aim of these courses is to illustrate, where appropriate, the connection among the arts, and to place artistic achievements in their social contexts.

These courses may be organized in many ways, though they will not be traditional surveys. The following examples of subjects and approaches are intended to be suggestive, not prescriptive: (a) Some courses may wish to focus on a specific time and place (such as Periclean Athens or Medicean Florence) and examine significant literary, artistic, and philosophical works with reference to their social and economic contexts. (b) Some courses may wish to study aspects of a specific stylistic movement (such as Neoclassicism, Romanticism, or Impressionism) by examining in detail selected works of art and literature viewed in their social contexts. (c) Other courses may wish to focus on a specific theme in intellectual history as it touches several cultures or nations (for example, country versus city, ideals of education, concepts of the happy man, or utopias).

(d) Still other courses might look at various movements, such as renaissances or revivals, in different countries and times, considering their causes, their shared characteristics, and their effects, while linking them with social and political needs. (e) Another type of course might be concerned with certain fundamental aspects of the creative process. For example, a course might consider how certain great artists, such as Euripides, Shakespeare, Goethe, Titian, and Beethoven, achieved in their final visions a resolution of those artistic and philosophical problems with which they had wrestled through a lifetime of creativity.

All such courses will necessarily be selective in their use of artistic and literary materials, and they need not be confined to the Western tradition, though this tradition should predominate in the listings of any given year.

Area 2. Historical Study

Characteristics of the Courses. These courses seek to accomplish two aims: (A) to orient students historically to some of the major concerns of the contemporary world; and (B) to help them acquire a measure of understanding of the complexity of human affairs in specific situations in the past and the process by which important changes have taken place.

The Requirement. One half-course in A and one half-course in B. The requirements may be fulfilled by students at any point in their four years; indeed, freshman year may not be the best time to take a course in either field. Certain courses in both A and B will be designated as also meeting the requirement in Area 5 (Foreign Cultures).

A. Historical Orientation to the Present. The purpose of these courses is to explain historically some major aspect of the present world. Courses will be broad in scope, addressing the

modern world in a global or near-global subject area. For this purpose, the "modern" world is defined as the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; but courses that deal with extended periods of history will be included in this category if they also meet the purpose of accounting historically for important issues in the present world. Examples of areas particularly appropriate to this category are: the development of modern political ideologies; the history of international conflicts in the modern world; and main trends in politics and social organization, in modern economic history, and in modern intellectual history.

B. The Process of History. The purpose of these courses is to examine in detail the complexity of transforming events, the interactions of social and economic circumstance, belief, purpose, effort, and accident that shape people's lives. These courses will involve students in affairs that once divided people sharply but no longer do and that now may be approached impartially. Courses will deal with (a) developments that shaped some significant portion of history irreversibly; (b) issues that were controversial in their own time and that people struggled over, hence manifest rather than latent issues; (c) issues that are not directly related to modern policy questions. These courses will include a broad view of some major transition in human affairs--origins, consolidation, and consequences--and provide sufficient detail to allow realistic judgments on particular participants, motives, perceptions, and decisions. Thus a course on the triumph of the Christian church in late classical antiquity, perhaps centering on the reign of Constantine or Julian, would be appropriate here; so too would courses on the challenge of the Protestant Reformation, the struggles that ensued, and the process by which accommodations were reached; on the origins and consequences of the Thirty Years' War; on the French, American, or Russian Revolution; on the English Civil War; and on

the challenge of and struggles over Darwinism.

Area 3. Social Analysis and Moral Reasoning

Characteristics of the Courses. The common aim of these courses is to introduce students to the central concepts and ideas of social science and moral and political philosophy, and to develop their analytic skills in understanding the fundamental social institutions and concerns of contemporary society. Courses will be organized around selected topics or themes chosen for their effectiveness in demonstrating how social scientists and philosophers think about social and moral issues. Courses will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on one of the following: (A) the application of a formal body of theory and of empirical data to an understanding of some fundamental aspect of individual or social life in contemporary society; or (B) the investigation of significant and recurrent questions of choice and value which arise in ordinary political and moral experience, drawing on writings of political and social theorists. Courses may include an historical or comparative dimension. They need not attempt comprehensive coverage of the work currently going on in any single discipline.

The Requirement. Two half-courses, one in Social Analysis (A) and one in Moral Reasoning (B). Certain courses in Social Analysis may also be designated as meeting the requirement in Area 5 (Foreign Cultures).

A. Social Analysis. The object of these courses is to familiarize students with some of the central approaches of the social sciences and to do so in a way that gives students a sense of how those approaches can enhance their understanding of human behavior in the context of contemporary society. The courses offered to meet this part of the Core requirement will provide coherent formal theories or analytical approaches that are tested

or illuminated by empirical data. A Core course in economics, for example, would explain the nature, assumptions, and consequences of rational choice in the context of scarce resources. A Core course in anthropology might explain the meaning of culture and how it affects ways of perceiving, valuing, and acting in a social context. A Core course in psychology might take as its central concept personality, motivation, or intelligence, whereas one in sociology might focus on the nature, causes, and implications of social stratification. A Core course in government might explore the nature of power in governmental decision-making.

In addition to exposing students to the Core approaches or theories of various disciplines, courses will also expose students to the empirical data (statistical or other) used by disciplines in testing or elucidating key theories or propositions. Consideration will be given to the limitations as well as to the uses of social science data. Wherever possible, courses will explore the implicit values and assumptions underlying the analysis.

The key criteria for acceptance into the Core for all courses will be whether such courses give students a systematic introduction to some major social science field and to its theoretical and empirical foundations. Introductory courses that place primary emphasis on current policy issues without explicit and substantial use of formal theories or approaches will not be eligible for inclusion.

B. Morai Reasoning. These courses will serve a multiple purpose: to introduce students to important traditions of thought, to make them aware of the intricacies of ethical argument, and to bring them to grips with particular questions of choice and value. They are to learn that it is possible to think systematically about such issues as justice, obligation, personal

responsibility, citizenship, and friendship. The emphasis in this part of the Core will be on Western traditions of thought and their relationship to political institutions and moral practice.

Courses will focus on ethics, law, and politics. Three different approaches to these subjects ought to be reflected in each year's Core listings. First, the historical approach, involving the study of major texts organized around one, or a very few, central themes, or examining in detail moral values and beliefs at some critical period of Western history; examples might be Greek ethics, or citizenship in historical perspective. Second, a disciplinary approach stressing those concepts and issues that underlie the study of moral, political, and legal choice: determinism and responsibility, utilitarianism, the theory of rights, law and morals, legitimacy, and so on. Third, an approach in terms of concrete problems such as distributive justice, obligation, civil rights, or medical ethics, emphasizing particular moral and political controversies, legal cases, and historical examples.

Area 4. Science

Characteristics of the Courses. The common aim of these courses is to help students increase their scientific literacy and their capacity to approach scientific material intelligently. A further purpose is to convey a general understanding of science as a way of looking at man and the world.

The wealth of important and fundamental scientific knowledge is immense and rapidly growing. So is the need to understand increasingly complex interrelations between science and human affairs. The Core science requirement is intended to ensure that every student acquires some appreciation of this vast and fundamental intellectual activity. In addition to the two half-

courses required, there is a mathematics prerequisite (discussed in Section IV) which will permit the Core courses to assume some mathematical preparation on the part of all students.

Observations of the physical and biological world have led scientists to formulate principles that provide universal explanations of diverse phenomena. These include the laws that govern classical dynamics, thermodynamics, radiation and the microscopic structure of matter, and the basic principles that underlie chemistry, molecular and cellular biology, biological evolution and behavior. The Core will contain courses that treat such basic scientific concepts and findings in some depth.

Every undergraduate should learn how scientists go about understanding the world through examples that illustrate these fundamental concepts and principles. The courses should consider not only what scientists believe is true in some domain, but also how they have developed and validated their laws and principles. The critical role of observation and experiment in this process should be exhibited.

Core courses need not be limited to, nor provide broad and full coverage of, a single discipline. It is hoped that a number of the courses created or adapted for the Core will be interdisciplinary in nature. Some may bring historical or social perspectives to bear, describing, for example, how commonly held views have been overturned by certain major scientific discoveries, and some of the methods and motivations of the discoverers. Several Core courses should have no prerequisite other than some knowledge of mathematics (see Section IV). The skills necessary to attack selected problems should be developed along the way. A number of courses, particularly in the physical sciences, may have a considerable mathematical component.

Many entering students already have a good background in the sciences. To serve these students, as well as those who wish

to pursue their scientific education beyond the minimum requirement, some courses that presuppose an understanding of certain basic concepts and theories should also be offered. These courses might focus on the major principles and findings in areas of contemporary scientific research.

The Requirement. One half-course in physical sciences and one half-course in biological and behavioral sciences, or one full course covering both fields. Nonscience concentrators may bypass Core courses on condition that they elect approved courses in the physical and biological/behavioral sciences at a more advanced level. Because the science requirement is designed to serve as an irreducible minimum, students are encouraged to explore this area more deeply and extensively through electives.

Area 5. Foreign Cultures

Characteristics of the Courses. The common aim of all the courses is to expand the student's range of cultural experience and to provide fresh perspectives on the student's own cultural assumptions and traditions. Courses may well emphasize language as a means of entry into another culture; but proficiency should not be considered enough in itself for this purpose.

Courses need not attempt comprehensive coverage, but rather will penetrate deeply into selected aspects of the culture being studied. They may be problem-oriented, and should include consideration of the historical background and contemporary aspects of the culture under study. As much as possible, they will devote attention to religious and ethical values, social systems, intellectual trends, and literary and artistic achievements. Whether the primary emphasis is on the analysis of key texts and works of art, on historical orientation and perspective, or on fundamental aspects of individual or social life, these courses will seek to identify the distinctive

patterns of thought, belief, and action that account for the particular configuration or ethos of another culture.

The foreign cultures studied in Core courses will, primarily but not exclusively, be living cultures and represent major cultural traditions. For these purposes, foreign cultures may be divided into two groups, with the principle that the less "foreign" a culture, the more advanced should be its study. The area subcommittee will determine the boundaries between the two groups on a case-by-case basis.

The Requirement. For Area 5, the Core requirement in Foreign Cultures may be met in any one of four ways:

a. One half-course devoted to the study of an important aspect of a major culture of the West and using the language of that culture. Courses available through this option will be listed under Core Areas 1, 2, or 3 and designated as also meeting the requirement in Area 5. The Core Subcommittee in Foreign Cultures will develop guidelines for establishing the level of expected language proficiency. Students choosing courses through this option will be expected to deal with texts or lectures in a foreign language, but we are not disposed to tie the necessary level of proficiency to a numerical score on an existing test.

b. One half-course devoted to the study of other major cultures in which, in view of the difficulty of the languages, texts would be read in translation. Courses under this option will be listed under Core Areas 1, 2, or 3 and designated as also meeting the requirement in Area 5.

c. One half-course which meets the objectives of Area 5 without meeting the criteria of Areas 1, 2, or 3 (such courses might treat two or more cultures or combine a number of disciplinary approaches). If Western European cultures provide the focus of study, courses will incorporate work in the appropriate foreign languages. Students who prefer this option will, in

effect, be choosing to take one half-course more than the seven or eight half-course minimum needed to meet the Core requirements in all areas.

It is our intention that most of the courses available through the preceding options will meet the conditions of (a) and (b). These will be proposed, developed, and reviewed by the Foreign Cultures Subcommittee, but they will be assigned to Literature and the Arts, Historical Studies, or Social Analysis by the Standing Committee on the Core Program in consultation with the subcommittees governing those areas.

d. Selected full second-year language courses which are qualified by virtue of the subject matter treated or the cultural access provided through purely linguistic study may also meet the Core requirement in Foreign Cultures. Students who prefer this option will, in effect, be choosing two half-courses in addition to the seven or eight half-course minimum needed to meet Core requirements in all areas.

III. Exemptions and Modifications

The Core Program establishes ten course requirements. However, the faculty intended that the Core requirement should normally require no more than the equivalent of one year of work, or eight half-courses. This temporal constraint is satisfied without jeopardizing the goals of the Core as follows.

First, students will receive exemptions from one or two Core fields that overlap their concentration (as determined by the Standing Committee) when the total concentration program satisfies the objectives of the Core. Thus, history concentrators would be exempted from the Core requirements in Area 2, Historical Study. This will reduce Core course requirements by one or two half-courses. Second, most of the courses meeting the Foreign Cultures requirement (Area 5) will also satisfy require-

ments in Areas 1, Literature and the Arts; 2, Historical Study; or 3, Social Analysis. This will reduce the Core requirement by one half-course. Together, these two modifications diminish the requirements of the Core Program to seven or eight half-courses. Some Core courses will count only toward the Foreign Cultures requirement; when students elect these courses, they will have to be taken in addition to the seven or eight half-courses otherwise required. Further adjustments will accommodate the special needs of transfer and advanced-standing students.

Modifications which allow alternative methods of satisfying Core objectives, but do not reduce the quantity of course work required for the Core, were authorized in the enabling legislation. First, the Standing Committee and its subcommittees were encouraged to permit a specified advanced half-course in a department to count for a Core requirement whose objectives it fulfills. Second, the committee was authorized and urged to designate particular "Core-related Sequences" containing two or more related or complementary half-courses, and allow such sequences to count for the Core requirement in the field whose objectives it fulfills. Third, the committee was asked to examine alternatives which permit students to shift no more than one half-course between areas of the Core. Fourth, the committee was authorized to adjust the requirements, as they relate to field specifications, on the basis of experience. All modifications made by the Standing Committee are to be reviewed by the full faculty in 1982-83.

IV. Other Nonconcentration Requirements

In formulating the Core Curriculum, the faculty also addressed certain other nonconcentration requirements in the college. Questions regarding the character of the concentration programs themselves were considered by a separate task force.

Writing

The faculty reaffirmed the importance of a requirement in Expository Writing, and placed responsibility for that requirement in the hands of a special subcommittee within the Core Program. It also made two recommendations for improving instruction in writing at Harvard. First, Expository Writing instruction should be linked with courses in the Core Curriculum, as a means of strengthening both. Second, evaluation of writing skills should be provided during the freshman orientation period; the small fraction of the class with substantial writing deficiencies will then be required to attend a noncredit remedial course during the fall term, before enrolling in a regular Expository Writing section in the spring term. The subcommittee is currently studying the implementation of these and other improvements in Expository Writing.

Foreign Language

In adopting the Core Curriculum, the faculty affirmed the value of knowledge of a foreign language, but referred detailed study of the foreign language requirement to a special committee. Pending the outcome of this consideration, the present foreign language requirement (one year of study in college, or a score of 560 or better on a foreign language examination) remains in force.

Mathematics

Finally, the faculty voted to institute a new degree requirement asking for demonstrated competence in the application of mathematics and quantitative reasoning. Details of this requirement are currently being developed by the Core Subcommittee on Mathematics. The emphasis will be on applications, for, by and large, this is the weakest aspect of prior training in mathematics and the one more widely called upon in college studies. The

vast majority of Harvard students have taken at least eleven years of earlier math courses. In recent years, the mean score of our freshmen on the SAT math test has been over 700, and almost all of our students have scores above the national average for high school seniors. But too many students are unable to use what they know in new contexts: for example, many students with a full year of college calculus had difficulty performing a simple linear extrapolation of data points in a second-year biology course.

Thus the main thrust of the mathematics requirement will be to bridge the gap between the student's theoretical knowledge and its application. One component will be the concept of function, and its role in understanding reality. A second component will be dealing with uncertainty through the techniques of probability and statistics. In addition, students will acquire an elementary knowledge of computer programming and familiarity with the Harvard time-sharing system, providing a base for the development and application of computer skills throughout the curriculum. A large majority of students will be able to satisfy the mathematics requirement by test, without having to enroll in a formally organized course. Self-study guides will be available, along with informal lectures and individual help provided at a Question Center; tests will be offered at frequent intervals. But for students who choose or need a more extensive and structured treatment, we will also offer a regular course covering the material of the mathematics requirement.

V. Implementation

Since the careful development or adaptation of courses suited to the purposes of the Core Program will take considerable time, the Core requirements will be gradually implemented over a four-year period. The freshmen who enter in the fall of 1979,

the class of '83, will be subject to the earlier General Education requirement, but their General Education program must include Core courses from at least two fields. The class of '84 must take Core courses in at least four fields. The class of '85 must take Core courses in a least six fields. The full Core requirements will apply to students in the class of '86 and beyond. The mathematics requirement will first apply to the class of '84, entering in the fall of 1980. During the transition, the General Education portion of the requirement may be satisfied by current General Education courses, by Core courses, or by the existing departmental bypass (two departmental courses equals one General Education course).

Core courses will first be offered in 1979-80, and will increase in number in the following years. Once implementation is complete, the overall Core Curriculum should offer between eighty and one hundred courses each year. Thus, on average, eight to ten courses will be available in each field in any given year.

The Standing Committee will report to the faculty annually on the status of the Core Program. The full Core Program and its requirements will be subject to review and approval by the full faculty in the academic year 1982-83.

WHERE DOES HARVARD LEAD US?

Barry O'Connell

"The only use of knowledge of the past is to equip us for the present. No more deadly harm can be done to young minds than by depreciation of the present. The present contains all that there is. It is holy ground; for it is the past, and it is the future."

Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education

Recent efforts of colleges to reform their curricula claim our attention. Amid the often trivial details of course requirements, faculty debates, and reports, we have ample reason to search for those significant changes which promise to help us meet the present that Whitehead describes. Our present, late in the twentieth century, threatens to overwhelm us. Few people, upon reflection, see a benign future for our society or for the world. Many have lost the will to work for a better future; the rest feel baffled by the complexities of our problems. Genuine democracy daily declines as a force in our political life; the economy of advanced capitalism becomes less and less rational; and at the darkest moments a selfish individualism destructive of every common good possesses us. We must confront the present, yet we know not how. We depend upon political and educational institutions for leadership, yet these institutions are themselves in disarray.

Each citizen rightly has his own notions of the most pressing needs in our society. But many lack the means of articulating their ideas, the power to act upon them, and the credentials our culture uses to confer on some the right to be heard and the opportunity to lead. American universities, especially the most prestigious, help maintain this inequality, which is perhaps the major barrier to a movement toward a decent

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future. They, almost exclusively, bestow the aura of qualification which creates a presumptive claim to privilege and leadership. Daniel Bell puts it succinctly: "Today, with higher education as the chief route of social mobility, the elite universities determine the new status positions of the postindustrial society. The singular fact is that a small number of universities have become the channels to place and position in the society." Harvard places first among the fourteen elite universities Bell names.

In view of this finding, it would seem reasonable to expect that reforms undertaken within a university would address the connection between higher education and social mobility within the society at large. I have examined proposals for restructuring the curriculum at twenty-five institutions. Few of them, and Harvard is no exception, confront this issue. Most simply urge some restoration of the degree requirements modified in the '60's. Many, Harvard prominently among them, recommend some version of a core curriculum. Institutions as different as Amherst, Brigham Young University, Emory, the University of Richmond, Middlebury, Saint Joseph's College in Indiana, and the University of Pennsylvania are considering, or have already adopted, new general education programs. The specific details differ, but the pattern is essentially similar. Each hopes to broaden students' learning and to engage faculty in more extradepartmental teaching.

These schools propose that each student generalize his or her education by taking courses in Western and non-Western civilizations, social and political analysis, ethics, science and mathematics, and in the humanities and the arts. Some through courses, others through competency examinations, also expect each student to achieve facility in another language, in expository writing, and in quantitative reasoning. A few colleges, while not following this pattern, are attempting to achieve the same ends by reimposing distribution requirements (as at Berkeley or Hamline

University in St. Paul). Others, like Stanford, might in a limited way follow the Chicago and Columbia general education programs by recommending a single course in Western civilization for all students. At Stanford, though, this effort has been undermined by the faculty's reluctance to offer a common course taught in small sections, since it would require them to teach beyond their specialties.

Most proposals genuflect dutifully to the usual clichés about the knowledge explosion, the expansion of the universities, and the problem of specialization. Little institutional self-examination occurs and, when it does, it covers a narrow range: what new courses are needed, what means can be devised to improve teaching, how best to cope with financial stringencies. Only a few documents inquire about the reasons for poor teaching, the fragmentation of the faculty, or the existence of thoughtlessly designed departmental majors. The few such inquiries I read tend to grandiose rhetoric (such as those of the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Wisconsin-Stout). Most of the proposed reforms are, with a disheartening frequency, mechanical and bureaucratic. More committees are recommended; vague guidelines are promulgated for faculty to meet in whatever individual fashion they choose. The crucial questions--about the role of the university in maintaining inequality and about the desired ends of an undergraduate education--are left untouched.

The curriculum recently adopted in Cambridge is neither original nor particularly distinguished. The Harvard "core" is, at best, a watered-down version of the experiments in general education conducted at Columbia in the 1920's, at Hutchins's Chicago in the 1930's, and at Harvard itself in the late 1940's. Compared with the report of the 1945 committee at Harvard, "General Education in a Free Society," it falls disappointingly short of expectations. The writers of the so-called "Redbook" sought to examine the whole of the American educational system,

and only within that context to address Harvard's special needs and possibilities. They wished to define an education appropriate to people's roles as citizens in a democracy as part of their argument for the necessity of creating a common democratic culture. Their successors at Harvard are notable in contrast only for the narrowness of their reflections.

The Harvard curriculum, unoriginal though it is, can instruct us about the nature of the crisis we actually face. Inertia in the large and more prestigious institutions plays a major part. Anyone who teaches in higher education knows how difficult it is to persuade a majority of one's colleagues to change a curriculum, reform a departmental major, or to reflect productively on the shape of the extracurriculum. Because faculties resist change, we perhaps should be uncritical when an institution like Harvard concludes a lengthy curricular review with some fresh resolution. Harvard, so far in this decade, stands out among universities of its rank and size in having actually adopted any substantial reform. Yale's faculty in 1973 rejected the Dahl committee's far more original, ingenious, and promising proposals. Princeton earlier failed to act. Berkeley and Stanford have made minor alterations in their curricula while claiming more significant changes. Chicago and Columbia, with some revisions, have maintained their traditional commitments to a strong general education program.

At Harvard, only the steady commitment of the president and a dean of the faculty chosen for his interest in reform, his political adroitness, and his toughness made any change possible. Even with the work of these two crucial officers, the outcome was in considerable doubt. Dean Henry Rosovsky began the process in 1974 with a letter to his colleagues. He followed it with the creation of task forces on the core curriculum, composition of the student body, pedagogical improvement, concentrations, advising and counseling, educational resources, and student life. The

preliminary report of the crucial committee on the core curriculum led to the appointment of five more committees, each charged with examining areas proposed for inclusion in the core. These committees were, in turn, transformed into a single committee out of which the final recommendations to the faculty emerged. The particular curricular proposals are less significant than the committee's recommendation that eight new committees be charged with implementing the new curriculum, which remains only the vaguest of paper designs. One committee will oversee the rest while the other seven supervise the curricular areas in the proposed core.

A new curriculum does not yet exist. Four years and countless hours of committee work brought a faculty vote agreeing to the outline of the requirements for a core. "Core" is, in truth, a misnomer, since the faculty in the next several years will create or redesignate no fewer than eighty and no more than one hundred courses that students may take to fulfill the requirements. Not until 1983 will the curriculum finally be in place. Harvard will then have spent nearly ten years in the creation of the program--an expensive process in faculty energy and time, and in money, which few institutions could afford to take as a model.

A dispassionate observer might conclude that Harvard has shaped the ideal curriculum for a corporate future. Its mode of design and its form of operation provide a model of bureaucracy. Like all effective bureaucracies, this one seems likely to specialize in persuading its clients that everything it does is in their best interest, while using the appearance of responsiveness to dilute dissent and to hinder clear thinking about the ends of the institution. This may be reform, but at least on paper it looks more like administrative reorganization. If changes in higher education are imperative, the kind of bureaucracy required at universities like Harvard seems certain to defeat anything of value. Inertia necessitates so many compromises as to deprive

Harvard, and those who might look to it, of just the sharp critical discourse we must have to respond intelligently to the needs of our colleges.

The areas recommended for the core are unsurprising. Students are to become acquainted with literature and the arts (three semester-long courses), with history (two), with social and philosophical analysis (two), science and mathematics (two), and with a foreign language or culture (one). Each student must also demonstrate a reading knowledge of a foreign language, an ability to express himself or herself in writing, and a basic mathematical competence (whether to the level of algebra or calculus is undecided). The education of the body through physical activity in athletics or in the arts goes unmentioned. Visual literacy, arguably essential in a culture dominated by the visual media, is equally unattended. These are not mere additions to a laundry list of requirements any of us might conceive. Harvard's conception of the essentials of a good education in 1978 is limited to subjects most scholars in 1900 would have regarded as the core. The anachronistic thinking evident in its new curriculum is not a matter of the inclusion of the traditional liberal arts, but of a failure to appreciate the centrality of new modes of understanding to our present lives.

Students today need, and ask for, opportunities through which they might venture to connect intellectual and practical activities--in the arts, in physical exercise, in community projects. An attempt to meet this need might help them believe they could effect some reforms in themselves and in society. More encounters with the difficulty and the art of transformation, with the movement from what one imagines to what one can make tangible, would do much to help students discover the patient discipline necessary if they are to avoid the paralysis so many say they feel. Another educational gain might also be accomplished with the inclusion of these subjects in a required

curriculum: few students (understandably, given their age) come to college with any compelling sense of what they must know. Once introduced to a subject or a mode of inquiry, they too readily believe they understand what they have yet to encounter.

The Harvard reforms reveal other failures of imagination and will. Each of them, while not easily explicable, derives from a reverence for departmental prerogatives, the great sacred cow in the academy. If, for instance, students ought to be acquainted with the history of a non-Western culture--as the Harvard curriculum proposes--then a one-semester course is simply insufficient. Two courses in science and mathematics are similarly inadequate. The problem might be resolved in one of two ways, but both would infringe on departmental preserves. More courses could be required outside the major; or, preferably, the departments might themselves be required to include more integrative courses in their offerings, at least at the introductory level.

Departmental power sustains the inertia afflicting Harvard and other universities. The deliberations at Harvard failed from the beginning to examine departmental majors, the primary determinant of the undergraduate curriculum. Dean Rosovsky could compliment the Harvard faculty in 1974 for its "persistent and intense self-scrutiny," when an outsider can find little evidence of this capacity in the lengthy process of curricular debate. The dean himself, in this same letter calling for a curricular review, excused the departments from scrutiny: "Departmental concentrations are normally well designed and taught. I might point out that this favorable assessment has never, to my knowledge, been seriously challenged either at Harvard or elsewhere." Yet, in the same document, he earlier refers to the "blur of concentrations" and explains the malaise of the General Education Program as a result of "the primacy of the disciplines and the pull of the departments."

His exoneration of the departments may have been a necessary political gesture, but the excuse tells us much about the obstacles to genuine reform. The subsequent report of the Task Force on the Concentrations is even more timid. It finds little to criticize and recommends essentially no change. Its only substantial recommendations, significantly, are directed at the few interdisciplinary concentrations at Harvard. These recommendations may well undermine or even destroy these valuable and, at Harvard, unusual enterprises.

Harvard's final curriculum committee conceded that it did not feel "competent to design a specific program of study outside of the concentrations but had seen its mission...as establishing individual committees of experts in various areas to recommend... the specific content of the core program." The acknowledgment suggests the incapacity of a departmentalized faculty to reflect interestingly upon, or to agree about, the ends of undergraduate education. The curriculum committee, in effect, resigned its task to the departments, the "experts" in the university. Students need a broader education than they commonly receive, but the focus on their narrowness appears misplaced. The more compelling need is for teachers who are both committed to general education and trained to engage in it. The seventy-year dominance of American universities by the departments has kept us from obtaining the kinds of teachers and scholars indispensable to the educational enterprise. The faculty itself, and not just at Harvard, may require a general education before it can offer the same to students.

Graduate education, then, may well be the linchpin of the whole system. Until it is reformed we will have few teachers or scholars prepared to teach outside their departments or sufficiently trained to perceive the ways in which disciplines now increasingly intersect. Here, too, the Harvard process failed. At the same time Dean Rosovsky absolved the departments from

scrutiny, he excluded graduate education from review: "Within the sphere of educational policy, the problems posed by graduate training should be debated and resolved primarily within departments. But the problems and questions of purpose posed by undergraduate education require the broadest possible consideration." This is a bit like asking the culprits to be the sheriffs and the judges. It appears willfully naive to call for "the broadest possible consideration" of undergraduate education while implying that graduate education has nothing much to do with it. Graduate education absorbs the energies of faculty in all the major universities. This, with the faculty's own intense professionalism, has distorted many majors into preprofessional programs.

Harvard's pretensions to leadership here collapse into irresponsibility. Harvard's influence upon graduate education is great; at least in this sphere it might conceivably have exerted genuine leadership, but it did not even choose to recognize the opportunity. If faculty are unwilling or unable to be models, it borders on hypocrisy to demand of undergraduates that they eschew narrowness and become acquainted with the major questions and modes of analysis in a wide range of fields. Some kind of core curriculum in graduate programs has much to recommend it. Students would encounter other disciplines, having some competence in a single discipline. Their maturity and knowledge might also encourage them to insist that such training demonstrate its usefulness to their own particular inquiries. The academic profession reproduces itself in the graduate schools. If students learn there that a narrow preparation insufficiently trains them for the scholarly and pedagogical life, then we could anticipate an actual transformation in the undergraduate college. We might also begin to get more scholars and teachers who understand they have vital responsibilities beyond the department, even beyond the university, to the education of all members of the society.

Otherwise, for the sake of honesty, we ought to forgo the name of professor and be called what we have virtually become--assistant, associate, or full technicians.

The problems many advocates of the new curricula, at Harvard and elsewhere, claim to alleviate, or to solve, originated long before the past decade. Students' vocational fixations are hardly new, nor are they discouraged by the very institutions whose faculties now deplore them. The knowledge explosion happened long ago. Specialization was well established and amply criticized by the end of Charles Eliot's tenure at Harvard. The elective system has prevailed in American education for almost a century. General education reforms decades ago proved unable either to check the elective system or to challenge the departments. The historical record makes evident that the terms of the present debate have been central to every critical examination of the academy for at least eighty years.

Why, then, all the attention to Harvard? Are we simply being gulled by the media's--and our own--inclinations to deference? One must almost believe so, given the alacrity with which the media have fastened onto the new Harvard curriculum as the solution to all our woes. Saturday Review reverently calls it "a quiet revolution" which promises to end the "anarchy" rampaging on the nation's campuses. The New York Times, no less, announces the end of the crisis as quickly as it seems to have been discovered: "So nothing will have been lost if the Harvard way becomes the nation's way." Surely even the problems these commentators cite are too great to be resolved by the changes in a single institution.

Harvard has attracted notice for its prestige, of course, but also because its new curriculum so easily can be taken as the nostrum for what ails us. Yet much more is at issue than has been acknowledged. An examination which clearly formulated the deeper problems in higher education would raise questions neither the

universities nor much of the society is prepared to face. I suspect it is for this reason that the media and many faculties have produced such superficial analyses and reforms.

In our time the universities have become the principal manufacturers and retailers of knowledge as a commodity--a transformation Clark Kerr vividly characterized in The Uses of the University. Universities have many buyers: students seeking credentials to insure prosperous futures, industries wanting the skills and products of faculty researchers, and the government needing an array of services. Something of substance is often exchanged in these transactions, but equally important to the purchasers are the intangibles of prestige, authority, and expertise the university confers.

Radical students in the '60's challenged the legitimacy of these academic functions. They argued that the university justified privilege and served the ends of power. The university might harbor some dissenters, but this could not excuse its principal activities. Few faculty members accepted these criticisms. Many perhaps regretted what the university had become but remained silent or insisted that there was no returning to the older ideal of the university as a place apart, the source of critical insight and even of opposition to what is.

Faculties across the nation made only one coherent response to these challenges. They abolished most of the degree requirements outside the major. It seems a curious response, since few radicals criticized the curriculum. But the abolition appealed because it seemed to express sympathy, though not agreement, with students and, most importantly, because it freed faculty from tasks many did not want--the teaching of courses outside their specialization and the regulation of students' extracurricular lives. It actually brought to culmination the historical process whereby the universities became purely the purveyors of credentials and technical knowledge.

The present student generation is repeating the experience of students in the '60's--with a different consequence. Students come to college now, as they did then, deeply troubled about the world they inhabit, skeptical about the capacity of most institutions to redress the apparently intransigent failures of our society, but hopeful that their educations might provide them with the understanding and the skills necessary to better the world they inherit. Their hopes are more tempered than those of their predecessors, their faith tipped toward cynicism and resignation. They nonetheless look to their teachers and to the academy itself. They want what the '60's radicals, or at least the best of them, wanted: an education, to paraphrase Whitehead, to develop their human capacity to attend experience, to teach them to think against what is, to imagine otherness, and to propose alternative ways of being, of organizing experience, societies, economies, and politics.

What do these often desperate and wary students find, especially in the elite institution, an adult culture which nearly mirrors the society at large? Teaching is, for the most part, honored mainly in public relations releases. The highest rewards go to those who pursue their special fields as intensely as possible. Faculty members appear primarily devoted to professional advancement and uninterested in a community of teachers and learners. The education of people for life in a democratic society is scarcely attempted. The proffered education is instead directed to reproducing the academic profession or to enhancing some students' competitive edge in the mobility race. Departments reign supreme, and the question of curriculum is relegated to their supervision with an occasional gesture toward a general, integrated education.

Students are quick to read the cues of their elders. Even in anticipation of college, they become obsessed with their professional futures. Once enrolled they grow fully

disillusioned, more quickly than in the '60's. Resignation and privatism replace open rebellion and political engagement. They elect courses in which they will earn high grades and directly prepare for the vocations they have chosen. They compete intensely because they know the universities produce many more graduates than there are desirable jobs or places in professional schools. What idealism remains is translated into a hope for a career of decency and some human usefulness, a private life of virtue and a public life held in abeyance.

This process does not conduce to much self-respect among the current student generation. Having lost their faith, as it were, they must now endure the excoriations of their teachers and the media for being narrowly obsessed with career, and, if one believes most of the curricular reports, inept at writing, incompetent in mathematics, and moral barbarians. I do not intend to portray students as wholly innocent. It bears remembering, however, that they bring to the academy the gifts and blindnesses the young have always brought. They are eager for guidance, anxious to learn for the most part, aspiring idealists when not full-fledged ones. They are also scared, ignorant, and dependent on those society tells them are older and wiser. What I wish to suggest is that the war against the young Richard Poirier found central to the '60's simply continues in a new guise in this decade.

Students are no worse educated than they ever were. While it is notoriously difficult to document reliably what undergraduates actually learn, in part because the universities are reluctant to test their effect on students, no existing evidence demonstrates that this generation of students is any more illiterate in English, or ignorant of history, mathematics, the sciences, and ethics than any previous generation. A decent case could be made that they are better educated. A commission appointed to investigate the recent decline in College Board

scores admitted that it could not be sure of the causes. Its members strongly suspected that the decline resulted from the increased numbers of students of black, working-class, and other minority backgrounds taking the tests--those students most disadvantaged in our public schools. This conclusion suggests that those Americans who have traditionally gone to college are at least as well, or as poorly, prepared as ever.

People unquestionably need greater understanding of the subjects now proposed as essential to the core: science and mathematics, the history of Western and non-Western civilizations, modes of social and political analysis, the great works of the humanities and art, philosophical and moral reflection. The provision of these subjects, however, will not of itself begin to meet the fundamental problems in higher education. The real crisis in higher education is older than faddish attention acknowledges; it goes deeper than mere curricular reform can touch.

The problems are simply enough stated. Professionalization within the university has sapped our ability to provide the general education Americans need. For democratic politics to thrive we need a common culture based upon everyone's having access to the means of knowing and understanding. We deny in America not simply a reasonable material equality, but--far more destructively--an equality of dignity and respect. The elite universities especially serve this last inequality. The value of their products--prestige, privilege, power, the appearance of authority--depends upon relative scarcity. If these goods were to become commonly available, they would lose their purchasing power.

The dissolution of requirements in the '60's diminished--in the telling metaphor of many curricular reports--the value of the coin. The market was flooded, as we know, with more holders of the bachelor's degree than could be accommodated. The

establishment of a core curriculum is an unconsciously astute solution. The reform is expensive to enact and to maintain; few colleges outside the elite ones will be able to afford it. Thus the coin of some institutions will rise in value at the expense of others.

Derek Bok's 1978 presidential report to the Harvard governing boards and alumni unintentionally reveals what and who a Harvard education actually promotes. President Bok frames his reflections on the state of his university with some remarks about his grandfather, Edward Bok, an archetypally self-made man of the nineteenth century. Edward Bok left school at thirteen. Later in life he was asked by the Yale Daily News if he regretted missing the college experience. His grandson quotes his response with no evident uneasiness about the values expressed: "I cannot picture to myself, much as I should like to do so, the environment of the modern college equipping a man for the practical affairs of life...." The failure of the nineteenth-century college is at least clear: it did not advance a man's business career or add to his money-making abilities. After much commentary intended to demonstrate the self-awareness of the Harvard faculty and the quality of Harvard's liberal education, President Bok returns to his grandfather: "To a boy without money in 1880, college must have seemed an expensive luxury. In today's world, college has become a necessity for young people of talent who aspire to an interesting life and a challenging career." The success of the twentieth-century college is manifest: its degrees have become prerequisites of material success.

President Bok laments the current atmosphere on campuses as one "tainted" by "pressure, anxiety, and competition for jobs." He believes the problem results from expanding enrollments and students' expectations that a college degree would insure "a better job, a larger income, a higher status." A close reader should be puzzled--for what the president at this point regrets

is what he himself advances as the purpose of a college education. He places responsibility elsewhere: the number of worthwhile jobs did not expand as rapidly as college enrollments. The disappointment to the hopes of many does not greatly trouble him, for he sees the difficulty working itself out quite naturally: "Students will begin to have more modest expectations . . . ; employers will gradually upgrade jobs to take advantage of the better educated men and women . . . ; and the number of college graduates competing for work will decline" with the drop in the percentage of eighteen-year-olds. And, one might add, the value of a Harvard diploma will be undiminished, the ranks of privilege maintained.

The report indicates that this implicitly crass justification of worldly success as the primary end of a college education is not simply the president's humor. Bok summarizes twenty years of data on changes in attitudes and aspirations among Harvard students through the course of their four years. Most notably, students' career ambitions rise, as does their desire for "higher status activities." Apparently in pursuit of these aims, the students achieve "a taste for self-discipline and control combined with a tendency to value achievement and power more highly than relations with other people." Harvard students agreed, looking back upon their education, that the college had "little influence on present friendships, or on moral, political, or religious perspectives," and "little lasting effect on their moral and ethical views." This evidence would compel most of us to ask the harshest questions about the quality of the liberal education President Bok commends. Instead, he proclaims society's need for generalists, notes that Harvard graduates have "a penchant" for such careers, and apparently assumes that they will somehow be those "individuals who can make decisions that require a sensitivity to many kinds of interests and an understanding of many different values and feelings and ways of

looking at the world." Perhaps we are to understand that "generalist" means "power hungry." It would seem that Harvard has no need of a new curriculum, for it has been impressively successful in producing students with the attitudes essential to making money, achieving power, and cloaking their privilege with evasive rhetoric.

The reforms Harvard has adopted are not in themselves wrong. They are too little and too late. They fail even to examine the internal structures in the university responsible for the problems. The immodesty and expense of the process in relation to the result should trouble us. Harvard no longer leads but has come to embody the difficulties that must be overcome if America is to renew its culture. It would be reassuring to believe with the New York Times that a first-rate educational institution survives, able to bring unusual intelligence and imagination to its problems. If such an institution exists, it is not Harvard. The Harvard deliberations revealed a depressing resemblance to the efforts of other universities to create new curricula. Whitehead would recognize with sadness what has happened to his Harvard: "The aged are those who, before all things, desire not to make a mistake." We must all share a concern that so many individuals of distinguished mind and achievement have been led to such a mediocre end. The whole process might teach the rest of us engaged in our own searching for what ought to be done.

We exist in a divided culture. Some have access to the means of understanding; most do not. Higher education will remain fatally compromised unless it confronts the unholy privileges that accompany a degree. Harvard's president is hardly alone in his uncritical acceptance of the university as the principal avenue to power and prosperity in America. We will make no worthy advances until we act out of a realization articulated by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur: "Every man who thinks and writes, without being hindered in his study or his research in a regime in

which his work is negotiated as merchandise, must perceive that his freedom and joy are corrupt, for they are the counterpart and, whether closely or remotely, the condition and the means of work which elsewhere is without freedom and joy. . . ."

For all the expansion of knowledge we know no more than the Greeks or the great Indian philosophers about the knowledge that truly matters. We know nothing more about how to become virtuous human beings, about how to make sane and decent living places for each other, about how to keep from either self-destruction or the destruction of others.

What we need is what we have always needed, and it is rare: great teachers among us. After that we need honest teachers who can acknowledge their ignorance and can join with their students in the efforts to lift it. No system can make great teachers, though some forms of education may present fewer obstacles to such men and women. Graduate education could be designed to encourage honest teachers and to broaden the universe of discourse they inhabit. It is here that general education is desperately needed and everywhere ignored. We now inherit the failures of several generations in higher education. The Harvard curriculum is ample evidence that most scholars and teachers no longer share a common discourse. Knowing that, they have come to rely on our society's substitute for the political and the educated life. Bureaucratic procedure creates the appearance of democracy by eliminating its substance. Some scholars and teachers have escaped the narrowness of their training; some remain always immune to it. It is these few who keep alive what vital education goes on.

SKIPPING THROUGH COLLEGE:
REFLECTIONS ON THE DECLINE OF LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

Alston Chase

The class is about to begin. The amphitheater is nearly full. Over 150 students, evincing the sartorial fashions of Goodwill Industries and Eastern Mountain Sports, wait, along with supererogatory faculty spouses and other auditors, for Professor Eikopf to appear. He enters by the stage door and stands behind the podium. He is a small, bald man with shining, innocent eyes slightly magnified by rimless glasses. His looks somehow combine the narrow calculation of a petroleum engineer with the ascetic humility of a Buddhist priest. He speaks into the microphone in a low, well-modulated voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he says, "welcome to German 101. I am humbled by the number of you present. In this course we will be reading the great classical works of German literature, written by such men as Goethe, Schiller, and von Kleist, in translation. No prerequisites are necessary. Before we go on to the subject of the course, however, I want to cover an administrative detail. So many of you have chosen this course that, having no teaching assistant, I cannot hope to read and correct all the assignments you will be given this semester. Therefore, in all honesty, I would like to ask a favor of you. I would like to ask you to take this course on the pass/fail option, so that I will not need to spend a lot of my valuable time grading your papers. If, however, any of you feel you cannot take this course on a pass/fail basis, I will have no recourse but to give you an A."

There is a titter of laughter. This course policy is not a surprise to most. In fact, for many, it is a reason for being there. Few opt for the pass/fail grade, naturally, preferring the guaranteed A.

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Professor Eikopf's courses are very popular. A couple of years ago he was given the Noah Webster Award. This prize is presented every other year to the professor who, according to a panel of college administrators, is considered the outstanding teacher on campus. He also knows what he is doing. He honestly does not like to waste his time grading papers and feels genuinely uncomfortable giving objective grades for work whose qualities can be only subjectively assessed. He is tired of black accusations that his department is racist because minorities tend to get poorer grades.

Most important, he is trying to protect his department colleagues. Like so many other colleges in the country, his college abolished the requirement that students achieve a certain level of proficiency in a foreign language before they graduate. As a result, enrollment in German, as well as in French and Spanish, dropped dramatically in the last decade (on a national average, 9 percent since 1970). Meanwhile, the dean of the college--aware of the decrease in enrollment for the entire college--is busy trying to cut the size of the faculty by refusing, whenever possible, to refill positions vacated by retiring or departing faculty. The dean, in reviewing the staffing needs of a given department, looks to see how many "full-time equivalent" (FTE) students are taught by each member of the department in a given term. If, say, the college average is fifty FTE's per faculty member per term, and the average number of FTE's per teacher in the German department is twenty-five per term, then, when the next vacancy occurs in the department, the dean will not fill it. In this way, as Professor Eikopf knows too well, the German department has been reduced from five professors to three. If they lose another, they will be unable to offer enough courses to provide a major in German.

The "battle of the FTE's" is a struggle for survival, where salesmanship is the name of the game and the strong departments

are those most successful in providing "marketable courses" to meet student demand. Obviously, a gut is more marketable than a tough course.

What Professor Eikopf is doing on a small scale is what his college is doing on a larger one. For the college is approaching the problem of sales: it has hired a good PR person to ensure a positive image and it tries to sell what is in current demand.

The New Dark Age

Although Eikopf is a fictional name, the straight-A professor really exists. His actions give meaning to the current buzz phrase "the decline of academic standards." There is no doubt that there is such a decline. Now everyone is aware of the problems at the secondary level: since 1963, national average SAT scores have dropped forty-nine points in verbal aptitude and thirty-two points in mathematical aptitude, and our public schools are turning out thousands of functional illiterates. The same situation obtains at the college and university level. According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, "General education is now a disaster area." As reported by the Chronicle of Higher Education, the Carnegie Foundation "argued that, instead of being shaped by a coherent educational philosophy, the content of general education had been determined by a number of internal and external forces--faculty interests, student concerns with the job market, 'relevance,' social fads, and the like." It is not difficult to agree with the Carnegie Foundation. Consider:

During the last ten years most colleges have dropped mandatory courses in essay writing and foreign languages and have weakened distribution requirements in the three basic areas of social science, natural science, and the humanities. During this period the number of electives taken at the major private liberal arts colleges has increased from 29 to 35 percent.

Curriculum committees, often with students on them, and college faculties routinely add new courses to the curriculum regardless of academic value, including courses in wood shop, photography, soap opera, roller coasting, political internship, and backpacking! Thus, each year the course catalogues become thicker with fashionable offerings of little or no academic value. Even the Harvard catalogue has doubled in thickness in the last twenty years and now contains over 2,600 listings. And it is still growing.

Giving "extensions" on papers and "incompletes" in courses has become a national epidemic. At Yale, according to a recent report by associate dean Martin Griffin, 22 percent of all students took at least one "incomplete" in the fall term of 1977. Most disturbing is the trend: while only 6 percent of the freshmen took "incompletes" that term, 20 percent of the sophomores, 33 percent of the juniors, and 31 percent of the seniors took at least one. Evidently the Yale experience teaches the rewards of procrastination.

Grade inflation is also epidemic. At Harvard, where one must assume resistance to this is greater than average, 85 percent of the class of 1977 graduated with honors, as compared with 39 percent for the class of 1957. Also, according to a recent report of the Harvard administration, 85 percent of all grades given there last year were B-minus or higher (compared with 70 percent in 1965-66).

Students are permitted to drop courses, in many cases well past the midpoint in the semester. This means a student can take a course, see how well he or she does and how hard the course is, and, if it is too hard, drop the course. At one well-known college, 50 percent of recent registrations resulted in "drops."

Many colleges delete from a student's transcript any failing grade. At Unity College in Maine, for instance, this is

known as "nonpunitive grading." The idea is that successes, not failures, be recorded.

Many colleges have committees, or "courts," often with students on them and sometimes without any faculty, that are empowered to overrule a professor on matters relating to giving grades, changing grades, granting extensions, incompletes, or dropping courses. Often these committees automatically find in favor of the student.

Minority programs have affected academic quality. At some schools the average SAT score of the disadvantaged students is nearly two hundred points lower than that of other students (the national average for minorities is one hundred points lower than that for nonminority students). Faced with that disparity of achievement in the classroom, the professor, feeling pressure from the minorities and suffering from white guilt, usually gives passing grades to minority students even if they are failing. But if failing students are given C's, those students who would normally have earned D's and C's will have to be given B's and A's, or else, like Professor Eikopf, the professor would simply throw up his hands and give all students A's.

As these examples suggest, America's colleges and universities have grievously failed to maintain minimum academic standards. For surely such standards require colleges to certify that students have taken courses in a range of subjects which a consensus of scholars believes are important and intellectually respectable; that the work done is of a certain quality and students have been sufficiently challenged to gain new confidence in their abilities and awareness of their weaknesses; that course policies recognize learning as a function of time, where taking twice as long to master a subject means learning half as much; and that students have mastered certain fundamental skills such as reading, writing, computation, and speaking a foreign language.

Reinventing the Wheel

Nothing is more trendy than education. Yesterday's heresy is today's creed. Five years ago everyone was still calling for more "relevant" courses and dropping "obsolete" requirements. At that time those who saw a decline in academic standards were either afraid to say so or were not listened to when they talked. Now it is respectable to decry the decline, to advocate quality and getting back to basics.

This bandwagon effect leads to the periodic reinvention of the wheel. For the last 150 years or longer, American education has seen a swing of the pendulum between scholasticism and vocationalism and between permissiveness and authoritarianism. It appears we are about to reinvent the wheel again.

Thirty-three years ago a prestigious Harvard committee issued a report defining and supporting the concept of a liberal (general) education (the famed "Redbook"). This report was highly influential. After it was issued, Harvard established its now well-known system of general education, and most of the rest of the community of higher education followed suit. Last March another prestigious Harvard committee, under the direction of Dean Henry Rosovsky, issued a report containing virtually the same message. It called for a return to the concept of a liberal education and suggested a system of "core requirements" which would ensure that students received a general education and which reflected the changes in curriculum and knowledge that have occurred in the last thirty years.

No doubt this report, like its predecessor, will be highly influential. The Harvard faculty, in early May, approved some of its recommendations and will probably soon adopt the remainder (with revisions). Later, the rest of the country will follow.

Or will it? Surely we will find, over the next few years, a great deal of momentum in the direction of higher standards and

general education, more blue-ribbon academic, governmental, and foundation committees, more curricular reviews, more highly publicized wars on illiteracy and pious posturing about the "educated man"; but where will it lead? Will we, ten years from now, look back on the coming decade as just another period of great hope and little achievement in American higher education?

I think we are in great danger of letting this happen.

Many important and perhaps irreversible changes have occurred in the last decade; one of the foremost has been the profound change in governance, whereby considerable control of the decision-making process devolved to students and faculty, making the role of college president the toughest job in the world. No longer can decisions be made by one person, sitting in Old Main, after conferring with a few colleagues. New ideas must now filter through student, faculty, and administrative committees, through the trustees or regents; they must be approved by the school's lawyers and be okayed in Washington. Then protests or lawsuits may send them back to the drawing board. Throughout this process the president, in many cases, acts only as a glorified referee.

Besides increasing the level of bureaucratic inertia, these institutional changes signal resistance to any academic revival because the present educational establishment adheres to the "new academic ideology," which is hostile to a quality education. This new orthodoxy is so pervasive that it will be difficult to find reformers who do not believe in it. To expect the educational establishment to reform itself, therefore, is so much wishful thinking.

What is this new academic ideology? To understand it, let us first take a look at the old one and see how the former grew out of the latter. This way it will be clear just why the new ideology is antithetical to quality education and why genuine educational reform is a long way off.

The Old Ideology, 1945-60

The years immediately following World War II were a time of academic renewal. The GI Bill brought veterans into the colleges in large numbers, infusing higher education with a new dynamism. In 1945, the Harvard committee recommendations calling for revisions in the Harvard curriculum had a ripple effect across the entire country. The essence of their message was that a liberal education was a general education as opposed to a special education. A general education, the committee held, should introduce students to a common historical and cultural background and should scrutinize the underlying ideals and assumptions on which modern society is based. In effect, general education became humanistic education, emphasizing the analysis of the value judgments on which our actions are based.

As we all know, by today's standards institutions in those days were thoroughly elitist. Only one person out of six went to college, compared with two out of five by the mid-'60's. Higher education was for the wealthy and, to a lesser extent, but ideally, for the gifted. So the fusion of the meritocratic ideal and the concept of a liberal education as essentially value-oriented produced a vision which was, at least unconsciously, Platonic.

Plato developed his philosophy largely as a response to the Sophists. The Sophists were itinerant teachers who claimed to teach citizens of fifth century B.C. Athens and other city-states how to win debates and, generally, how to succeed by appearing to be clever. As theoretical support for their teachings, the Sophists developed a philosophy of relativism. There was no central, objective truth: anything that anyone believes is as true as what the next person believes. All ideas are equally true.

So the Sophists were the first egalitarians of ideas. In response to this, Plato held that not only is there objective truth, but the highest truth has ethical value and the pursuit of truth is an intrinsically good activity. In fact, the only

activity which has intrinsic moral value is the pursuit of truth, and the order of reality--the truths which we pursue--is hierarchical. This in turn led him to a principle of social organization: a society comes closer to the truth (and thus is a better society) if and when the wisest rule, the bravest are soldiers, those with green thumbs grow food, etc. This meant that the best society is one in which everyone does what he or she does best.

Plato presented many arguments in refutation of the Sophists, arguments which were so convincing that they seemed to bury relativism for all time. Stripped to their essentials, they said that if relativism is true, then there is no truth, no knowledge (an implication some Sophists, such as Gorgias, were willing to accept). But we know there is knowledge; we have perfect examples of it in mathematics. Besides, if there were no knowledge, relativism, as it pretends to give knowledge, would be false.

For many centuries Plato's philosophy has presented the paradigm rationale for scholarly activity, and it is not surprising that it perfectly expressed the values of the early postwar academic establishment. Classicism at that time was still very strong. At Princeton in the '40's and '50's, the classics department was the most influential on campus. Under Whitney Oates, it helped Robert Goheen, a professor of classics, to the presidency of the university and Francis Godolphin, another classicist, to the deanship. President Pusey at Harvard, arriving in 1953, was also a classicist.

The private liberal arts colleges at that time at least pretended to be committed to one value: the pursuit of knowledge. Their ideal was of a community of scholars sharing this value and through sharing becoming a harmonious whole. The method of college governance at that time reflected this vision: if, ideally, relations between members of the community were based on trust, there was no need to provide institutional safeguards to protect individual rights.

The Academic Revolution

There were already at work, however, during this period of 1945-60, powerful demographic forces undermining the Platonic ideology. These forces as a group constituted what Riesman and Jencks called "the Academic Revolution." In essence, the Academic Revolution was a transference of allegiance by the members of the scholarly community from the particular colleges and universities which employed them to their professions or professional fields. The loyal Mr. Chips was replaced by the mobile professional.

The Academic Revolution had been going on for over a hundred years as just another facet of the trend toward specialization. But it was greatly accelerated by the post-World War II growth of colleges and universities, the foundation of many state colleges and universities, and the demand for faculty, which in turn accelerated the Ph.D. mills, academic salary increases, and competition between institutions for teachers. As a teacher became more in demand, he saw himself as a philosopher or linguist first and only secondarily as a member of a particular college community.

Also, these new academics, having received a highly specialized schooling in graduate school, regarded themselves as specialists training other specialists in the same field. Thus a professor of philosophy would teach philosophy to students who would become teachers of philosophy, and so on, apparently forever.

Then, too, as professors became increasingly itinerant, few had the opportunity or the incentive to become involved with questions of curriculum and academic standards, or to develop a profound educational philosophy.

Most important, however, this new generation of academics tended to see the campus as consisting of a number of separate and often competing departments rather than as a community of scholars united in a common pursuit, just as they tended to see the world, through their work, as a collection of disparate problems to be

solved rather than as a community of life, linked in interdependence and sharing a common history and future.

The Politicization of Academe

The violence of the last decade--the Kennedy and King assassinations, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the invasion of Cambodia, the anti-war demonstrations, the race riots, the campus riots, and the Kent State tragedy--destroyed the apolitical, Platonic innocence of the campus. It was a time when it was difficult to put one's mind on scholarship. Students came to college hostile to any institution or individual that did not take a stand against the war or for civil rights. They demonstrated. They demanded more participation in college governance. They demanded more relevant--i.e., more political--courses. They demanded more social freedom, better grievance procedures, and a documentation of their "rights and freedoms." They demanded veto power over endowment investment decisions and the abolition of grades and "outmoded" course requirements, including English essay writing, foreign languages, religion courses, comprehensive examinations.

The faculties and administrations, largely sympathetic to the students' political concerns, and fearing violence, gave in to these demands to one degree or another, usually without much debate.

At the same time the civil rights movement was accelerating. Most colleges and universities, again responding to student concerns, carried along by the momentum of the times, and making use of newly available federal funds for the purpose, began aggressively recruiting disadvantaged minority students whose preparation for college was in many cases far below that of other students. This gulf was bridged by a more liberalized application of grading standards.

These events transformed campuses into the antitheses of the Platonic ideal. The supposition that truth was objective was replaced by ad hominem suspicions and a belief only in "commitment." The close-knit community of scholars dissolved into a Babel of conflicting groups, each using the campus as an arena in which to pursue its interests and ideas. Governance by an autocratic if benevolent president gave way to pluralistic democracy.

The Platonic ideal itself was given up, not only because events made it apparently so irrelevant, and not only because it was simply not understood by the new students, but also because a majority of the faculty and administrators, themselves children of the Academic Revolution, did not share it. When the students began to attack the system as elitist, the faculty and administration had little ideological ammunition with which to defend the status quo. It was as though the majority were ashamed of the existing system and the quicker things were changed the less embarrassment for all. The students had exposed a gaping void in educational philosophy.

The New Ideology

During this period the social scientist began to assume more influence on campus. These were political times with political problems that were thought to call for political expertise. The social scientists were seen as possessing this expertise. The campuses appeared transformed into microcosmic versions of the country at large, and they apparently needed reorganization along the lines of a state or federal government. Faculty constitutions were rewritten, students' bills of rights were composed, and judicial committees were set up to settle disputes. It is not surprising, therefore, that during this period social scientists and lawyers emerged in positions of power in college administrations. Bok, a lawyer, replaced Pusey at Harvard. Brewster, another lawyer, became president of Yale. Bowen, an economist, assumed the presidency of Princeton.

The social scientist approached the problem then facing the campuses with a new ideology, and this ideology quickly became the new orthodoxy. It saw the campus as a pluralistic society of competing interest groups, each fighting for its slice of the pie. The college resolved these disparate claims on its purse by a process which could be described as adversarial resolution. That is, as decisions were made by the administration or by faculty or student senates on the recommendations of committees where all relevant interests were represented, priorities were established by compromise between the different factions. This in turn rewarded those who organized politically and brought further fragmentation to the campus.

Somewhere in the profusion of competing interests the goal of the pursuit of knowledge was submerged. At best it surfaced as one of the values being touted. For this process was thoroughly egalitarian. If all interests are equal, so are all ideas. If there was sufficient demand for courses on auto mechanics for women (which Goucher College offers today), then these courses were valuable, and presumably equally as valuable as courses on Shakespeare.

The New Sophism

If Platonism was at the heart of the old academic ideology, sophism was at the heart of the new. For this new egalitarianism of ideas was based on a new relativism, a relativism which was derived from the methodology of the social sciences.

Social science is the study of man's actions, values, ideas, emotions, and institutions. The scientific approach to these subjects requires the scientist to be as objective as possible. Objectivity in any discussion of human values requires that the scientist remain neutral with respect to the ideas of the peoples studied. But to remain neutral in any discussion of values is to refrain from making any value judgment; it is to remain an egalitarian of ideas. Ideas are so much "data," to be quantitatively

measured, not subjectively or qualitatively assessed. This is what it means to be "value neutral."

The social sciences are, or aspire to be, sciences; they have a scientific methodology. Although there are many scientific methodologies, the majority of social scientists have adopted a form of radical empiricism. According to this doctrine, the only sentences that are scientifically acceptable are those that are directly verifiable by experiment. But no value judgment is verifiable, and therefore, it is held, no value judgment is objectively true or false; one is as true as another.

This means that sentences such as "The pursuit of knowledge is better than the pursuit of sex," "Shakespeare is a better writer than Larry Flynt," and "Writing essays on Macaulay, although dull, is good exercise" are no more or less true than such sentences as "The pursuit of sex is better than the pursuit of knowledge," "Larry Flynt is a better writer than Shakespeare," and "Writing essays of any kind, but especially on Macaulay, doesn't teach a person anything of value." It also means that such sentences as "The academic establishment's insistence on the study of Western heritage represents a cultural bias" may very well turn out to be true because, depending on how "cultural bias" is defined, it may be verifiable.

This methodology was borrowed from the teachings of the logical positivists, who held that, roughly speaking, no proposition is meaningful unless it is verifiable. Using this principle as a forensic weapon, they dismissed whole categories of propositions as meaningless. For instance, they held that all moral statements were meaningless. When I say, "Stealing is wrong," they said, I am not saying anything at all; what I am doing instead is announcing my opposition to stealing, just as though I were saying, "Down with stealing!" So such statements have no "cognitive content" and there can be no rational argument about them. Moral utterances, therefore, only express emotional attitudes which have no objective validity.

Logical positivism was given up long ago by most scientists and philosophers, including many of the positivists themselves. Yet this positivist doctrine, germinated but failing to flower in philosophy, has taken firm root in the social sciences. It has done so because it provides a simple (if oversimple) distinction between fact and value which allows social scientists to make the (sometimes bogus) claim of scientific objectivity. They can claim they are dealing with facts and are neutral with regard to values.

The growth of a pluralistic social framework and egalitarian ethos on campus during the '60's found its perfect rationale in this positivistic ideology from the social sciences. For its message was clear: all ideas are of equal value and therefore everyone should have an equal voice in the determining of academic policy.

The influence of this philosophy on campus became pervasive. That one subject was thought no more worthy of study than another was reflected in the curriculum, where courses were offered seemingly with no overall rationale other than a random response to demand: a department of African studies here, a political internship program there, and a nursing program somewhere else. The colleges were "lengthening the cafeteria line" from which students could choose while at the same time diluting the quality of education.

The relativism of standards, moreover, invaded many disciplines, affecting the content of courses. English literature, for instance, was at one time considered the study of good writing. That is, one could not define the subject without making a value judgment. But the new ideology held that no value judgment has objective validity. Hence the study of literature should not be considered the study of good literature, where what is deemed "good" is determined by some broad, historically established standard; rather, what is good is what anyone--instructor, student--thinks is good. So, for instance, a professor I know gave a

course on "the literature of feminism" which excluded such classical feminists as George Sand and Virginia Woolf and devoted itself entirely to journalistic and political pieces by leaders of the contemporary movement. Regardless of the value of what this person was teaching, she was not teaching English literature, the only thing she was qualified to teach. In reality, she was teaching sociology.

Academe Today

It is not surprising that the traumatizing events of the '60's generated a new academic ideology. But those events are well behind us; the campuses are quiet again and today's students are more serious than ever. And yet relativism, a philosophy without any sound foundation, which Plato discredited two thousand years ago and which few philosophers would accept today, still pervades academe. It does because it is encouraged by current political and demographic forces: the new democratic forms of college governance, American political opinion and trends in litigation, the decreasing number of students and amount of money now entering higher education, and the growing federal involvement. In particular, there are five phenomena which encourage the persistence of the new ideology.

First, it's still provides a rationale for the status quo. Present practices in college governance usually involve the use of committees which include at least one representative of each campus interest group. But such committees, being evenly balanced, almost never succeed in making unequivocal value judgments, because to do so is to put one interest over another. This usually suits the administration, because any "hard" decision promoting one policy over another makes a lot of people angry. So, in the present world of higher education, with its hodgepodge of programs and confusion over goals, as long as all values are equal, there is no need to make difficult decisions which commit

an institution to one set of values over another. Despite all the jargon about "prioritizing," few institutions do it.

Second, the new student generation is concerned about its dwindling opportunities in the job market and is more competitive and practical-minded than ever. As a result, students put pressure on faculty to give them high grades to increase their chances of finding jobs. They also encourage the colleges to offer vocational courses for academic credit (today over 58 percent of all undergraduates are enrolled in vocational courses, as compared with 36 percent in 1969). The former creates a new incentive for grade inflation and the latter further dilutes what little meaning there is left in the phrase "academic credit."

Third, the baby boom has passed and colleges are competing with each other over a decreasing pool of student applicants. Faced with this stiffer competition, the colleges are making a more concerted attempt to find out what kinds of courses are wanted and to offer them. This approach, like that of our straight-A professor, recognizes no academic value as more important than another, unless it is the value which is determined by supply and demand.

Fourth, the influence of the federal government within higher education is increasing. As the amount of money for private colleges and universities shrinks or is eaten up by inflation, and as their share of the market declines relative to that of public institutions, they are becoming increasingly dependent on federal aid. According to William F. Buckley in his article "Giving Yale to Connecticut," Harvard receives 25 percent of its income from the government, while MIT gets 65 percent. These amounts are increasing, and with the increase in aid comes an increase in interference, involving faculty hiring practices, student rights, minority programs, and administrative procedures. This interference cannot help but have a substantive effect on the quality of offerings in the classroom.

Fifth, the fragmentation of the campuses is getting worse, not better. As the financial problems of the colleges increase, the relative income of their employees goes down. Since 1969, for instance, professors' salaries have risen at a 6 percent annual rate as compared with an 8 percent annual rate for other workers. But as the pie shrinks, faculties are less inclined to fight for academic quality and more inclined to fight for their pocketbooks. According to a recent survey of college faculties across the country, over 75 percent are in favor of collective bargaining for professors. But in unionizing, they are reinforcing themselves as merely another campus interest group, fighting its battles with little concern about the future of the institution or the quality of education. In this way, they instantiate the devisive pluralism of the new ideology.

It should be noted that all faculties see a perfect identity between their economic self-interest and the needs of higher academic quality. That is, they assert that unless they are paid more and given more research time, the quality of the people entering their profession or their college will decline, and so will the quality of research and teaching. But this is not the case. If it were, then the quality of education offered during the '60's--when professors were better paid than before or after--would have been noticeably better than at other times; but though more courses were offered during the '60's, there is little evidence that education improved and much that it declined.

The Future of Higher Education

In the past year, Amherst, Middlebury, Cornell, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins, among others, have, along with Harvard, addressed or initiated curricular reform. Their efforts are at best the first steps at righting a disgraceful situation, dealing primarily with distribution requirements and not touching a range of other problems, from grade inflation to quality control in the

curriculum. Harvard's proposed reform is the most ambitious of the lot (Yale and Princeton recently rejected similar ones); yet it affects only 25 percent of the curriculum, and within that quarter (the so-called "core" requirements) students still have a considerable range of options.

More significant, the mechanism by which the Harvard reform is being effected, and the personnel responsible for it, graphically symbolize the continuing influence of the new ideology. For the problem facing reformers is a highly political one. Henry Rosovsky is reported as saying that Harvard is involving many more people in the decision than did the colleges where similar proposals were quashed. Yet the price paid for politicizing the decision-making process is compromise, and Rosovsky's proposal, having passed through so many hands, is now a considerably diluted version of the original (the number of core areas having been reduced from eight to five). Also, as this process is seen as one requiring intense lobbying for passage, it is not surprising that social scientists have emerged as its custodians. In an article in the Saturday Review ("Confusion at Harvard"), Susan Schiefelbein quotes eight members of the Harvard community, including those most intimately associated with the proposal. All are social scientists. Surely their high profile demonstrates that, as there is little consensus on the question of priorities, the contemporary academic community perceives that its major problems are still political ones.

To achieve a more profound reform, therefore, requires that these and other institutions of higher education reject the new ideology. They must eschew the temptation to be all things to all people by rededicating themselves to the pursuit of knowledge and the analysis of values. They must discourage divisive pluralism in their own communities by adopting new mechanisms of decision-making which reward partisan advocacy less than current mechanisms do. Finally, they must resist government encroachment by a

determination to do without aid whenever possible, and through this paring develop more streamlined and less diffuse academic programs.

This does not mean that colleges and universities must become enclaves of autocracy and intellectual snobbery. Rather, they should strike a balance between the requisites of scientific objectivity and the adoption of values, and between the egalitarian demands of a democratic society and the needs of scholarship. This will occur, however, only when academe comes to perceive that it is not necessarily a microcosm of the nation but an entity somewhat apart and different, a community of scholars, diverse to be sure, but engaged in a common pursuit. Paradoxically, it will serve us best not by copying society but by remaining a constructive critic of it; not by responding to ephemeral political and economic pressures but by remaining sensitive to the long-range requirements of its mission.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

"How does one pass on a civilized tradition and, at the same time, educate young people not only to preserve but also to question, alter, and, one would hope, enrich their heritage?" asked Joel Colton, director for Humanities, as he introduced the general conference topic: "Toward the Restoration of the Liberal Arts Curriculum."

Many of those present, in the words of Dr. Colton, "had been actively involved in education in the late 1960's. Some had remained unswervingly faithful to certain continuing traditions, and others, while maintaining standards of excellence, had helped to introduce greater flexibility and experimentation into the curriculum as well as into extracurricular life on campuses." The most important phenomenon of the late 1960's, he declared, "was that the faculties of major institutions could no longer agree on the essential elements of a liberal education. A consensus that had previously existed disappeared. Today we witness a striking phenomenon, a return not to an agreement as to what constitutes a liberal education, but an agreement to raise some of the questions once again, and an attempt to move toward consensus."

In an effort to examine what such a consensus might be, Dr. Colton noted that the conference, organized in a relatively structured way, would examine three topics within the broad subject of educational change. "First, we'll look at a liberal arts institution with a curriculum that has remained relatively unchanged over four decades--St. John's College. Second, we would like to assess some of the upheavals and transformations of the 1960's and early 1970's, and, last, we will examine the return to what might be called a core curriculum."

Eva Brann, whose paper describing the curriculum at St. John's had been distributed to the participants earlier, spoke first. This was not to be, she stressed, a substitute for her paper, but

rather a brief review to set her conclusions in perspective.

It seemed, observed Dr. Brann, that "every curriculum bears with it an enormous burden of intellectual determination, of philosophical faith. One of the objects of having an explicit, generally agreed-upon program is precisely that this philosophical background should be both articulable and minimal--articulable, just because there is a clear plan before everyone, with a history and a practice behind it, all open to continual discussion; minimal, precisely because there are as few hidden determinations as possible, fewer, certainly, than there are in more eclectic programs."

Dr. Brann concentrated not so much on what comprised the program, but rather on why the St. John's plan had endured, and why, in her opinion, it had changed little. The seminar, at the heart of the St. John's system, "deals with the authors of the Western tradition and the tutorials deal with the liberal arts or skills." The two major skills are language and mathematics, or the "skills of speech and the skills of the objects of knowledge."

These skills are vital for the students if they are to have access to their own roots. It is for the sake of achieving such access that St. John's engages in its peculiar and pervasive "preoccupation with modernity." Dr. Brann described "what the program is emphatically not intended to be. The St. John's curriculum," she said, "is often called traditionalist, which implies some special love for old and bygone things. I know no other school at which the past is of less importance than it is at St. John's. If there is one dogma that is built into the school, it is that modernity has certain roots in antiquity, roots both of continuity and revolution, and thus without the study of the ancient and medieval philosophers, it is not possible to have access to ourselves. Traditional knowledge is not studied for its own sake but only insofar as it has entered into the present and is indispensable for explaining us to ourselves."

The St. John's curriculum, Dr. Brann said, "offers not a predetermined way of looking at the world, but rather something that I call radical reflection, which means leaving no question unasked and pursuing every possible question that a student or tutor can raise as far as possible into the depths of things. It is, I think, essentially a philosophical curriculum."

But what about changes at St. John's? asked the other conference participants. Were none desired by students and faculty, particularly during the upheavals of the late '60's and early '70's? asked Dr. Henry Wasser. In partial explanation, Richard Weigle, president of St. John's, described a conversation with a student during the time of the worst campus upheavals in the U.S.: "Why should we strike here?" the student said. "We already have what they're fighting for in other places." "This meant to me," Dr. Weigle commented, "that they were personally involved in their learning and felt that the administrators and teachers cared."

"But," insisted John Sawhill, "we all think about curriculum reform and revision all the time--has not your faculty thought about changing the curriculum at all?"

Eva Brann responded to the suggestion of building the program around a theme or idea: "Nothing could be more contrary to what we want to do. We are most anxious to keep the arena free of imposed intellectual structure, and that's why we read the books we do. If we were to choose one or the other of the great ideas or our own great ideas and build the curriculum around them, we would have lost everything we are most anxious to preserve."

In general, the conference participants did not seem to disagree so much with what was included in the St. John's curriculum as with what was omitted. A recurrent criticism pointed out the lack of newer titles in some of the rapidly expanding fields--Walter Rosenblith especially mentioned scientific works and John Sawyer contributions in the life sciences. But the most common disagreement with the St. John's approach, shared by many of the

conferees, was its lack of historical perspective and its insularity, fostered by a program composed solely of texts drawn from the Western traditions. Could the students, the participants questioned, come out of such a background with a practical understanding of the world and their place in it?

Dr. Sawyer, for example, said, "It is useful that St. John's has not allowed itself to homogenize or to follow the swings toward either the core curriculum or to the electives of various patterns. But I am uneasy about the absence of the historical context in which these materials are read and, in addition, I wonder whether human questions are indeed always the same, or whether there are not some major transitions in the knowledge base and therefore in our perception of the universe. And I wonder whether the education of young people should not include some greater exposure to these changes."

The participants explaining the St. John's view conceded some of these points and stressed that constant discussion and review of their curriculum was necessary in order to maintain the general agreement that their approach was as it should be. Both Dean Robert Bart and Eva Brann mentioned changes now being made--one example being a new biology sequence, another a program in genetics.

Several participants were eager to know what happened to the average St. John's graduate. Ray Cave, an alumnus, believed that in general they are more than usually articulate, and include a very large percentage of lawyers.

Dr. Weigle agreed, and added that there are several areas in which St. John's graduates are perhaps not so well prepared as those of other schools--the sciences and social sciences, for example, fields in which the graduates might require extra work before going on to graduate school or other endeavors.

But, in general, the St. John's spokesmen assumed that they would continue to hold firm to the methods of the past. Dr. Brann

defended the lack of non-Western perspectives by saying that "we would never argue that one ought not to look at other civilizations but rather that it takes four full years to learn even a small amount about one's own."

President Richard Weigle summed up the St. John's ideology: "It's the discussion itself that's so crucial to the whole enterprise. The learning of the analytical skills, the skills needed for expressing ideas, for seeing alternatives and trying to choose between them; that's one of the big objectives we are trying to accomplish."

With the introduction of the second speaker, Gerald Grant, the conference turned its attention to the most general of the three topics mentioned by Dr. Colton in his opening remarks: "the general upheavals and transformations of the 1960's and 1970's."

Dr. Grant tried to clarify some of the complex questions raised in his paper, but was not optimistic that sweeping changes for the better would happen soon. Although he asserted that there were many excellent reasons for the campus unrest of the '60's, he pointed out that it was partially in response to the "intensification of the demands on undergraduate students in the 1950's in the most selective colleges and universities. Reading lists," he noted, "had grown by leaps and bounds and students who worked hard to get into colleges were working still harder to get into graduate school." The ensuing discontent "overlapped in certain ways with the antiwar movement, leading to demands for relaxation of the curriculum, which resulted in greater autonomy for the students."

The faculty hoped that granting concessions in the curriculum would reduce some of the uprisings on the campuses, Dr. Grant said, adding, "And now we're very much concerned about reestablishing some kind of coherence in the curriculum. I guess I'm a doubter, and somewhat pessimistic. I think that most campuses are not in the favorable position of Harvard, which continues to be oversubscribed in a day of relative decline in enrollment. Many

campuses will be reluctant to impose any requirements if they think they're going to turn away students."

In further explanation of difficulties faced by administrations contemplating change, Dr. Grant pointed out that for many educational institutions, pragmatic necessity often prevails: "There are very few agreed-upon definitions in this country of the educated person. There's no Oxford model, and there's no agreement by society when it comes to employment about how to define a decent education. In addition, in many institutions where enrollments have declined, faculty have been pressed to secure outside funding and to increase the supply of soft money to replace lost tuition dollars, while others are urged to become more entrepreneurial in their curriculum offerings. Thus, in the great mass of institutions competing for a declining enrollment base, there's little energy and even less time for the development of new core curriculums."

The conference participants responded to Dr. Grant's paper and his additional remarks with a variety of questions and opinions, both practical and philosophical. Several wondered whether changes could really be effected, and most did not seem certain as to the existence of guidelines with which to measure improvement in educational method.

Charles Muscatine agreed with Gerald Grant's point that the curriculum changes of the late '60's reflected genuine discontent with the curriculum and were not merely a reaction to emotional pressures. He went on to say that "at Berkeley, we had the feeling when we were cleaning out the old curriculum that we were clearing the decks for something new, because the old curriculum was not really working as a core or as a generally humanizing influence. The question now is whether we're putting back something that we already judged to be ineffective fifteen or twenty years ago."

Dr. John H. Knowles described a conversation with Father Theodore Hesburgh, who had pointed out that the major concern of the 1960's seemed to be equality, and that of the 1970's, quality. Said Dr. Knowles, "We've shifted, not only in education but also in many other aspects of American life, from a rather permissive group of vested interests, all shouting at the top of their lungs, to what people might interpret as a swing toward the right or the center--at the least toward a little more discipline." Ernest Bartell agreed. "We are concerned," he said, "with an attempt to restore discipline and rigor. But if we quickly regress to the models we knew before, are we paying sufficient attention to what has happened in the intervening period, to the changes that are still with us? If we announce that what was good before is still good for everybody, is there not a burden of proof on the educators to show that it is good for a student clientele that is different in age, sex, race composition from the way it was back before the days of student unrest?"

Summarizing a number of fragmentary comments, Adele Simmons touched on a basic problem: "We must somehow equate the development and imposition of a system of requirements with an improvement in the quality of education and with higher standards. And I think that's a trap people are falling into, because as institutions get into a kind of spring housecleaning, we have no guarantee that fundamental questions are going to be answered, or that the standards of quality of education itself will improve."

At this point, Dr. Colton moved the thrust of the conference from the general to the particular, introducing Dr. Henry Rosovsky, who would comment on some of the practicalities involved in actually producing the report on the proposed core curriculum by Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Rosovsky presented his remarks from a prepared paper, "The Politics of Educational Reform," written in collaboration with Dr. Phyllis Keller as a

chapter for a forthcoming book. He focused on "the political and ideological aspects of curricular controversy against the background of national and campus moods."

Why, asked Dean Rosovsky, after Harvard had decided to undertake curriculum reform in 1974, were there so many times when failure seemed probable? Why did these attitudes prevail and what were the dangers? Dr. Rosovsky traced the establishment of the core curriculum in some detail: "A curriculum or a set of requirements implies agreement about something: a standard, a body of knowledge, the relevance of certain skills. It is significant that educators have had relatively little difficulty in reaching agreement at the level of professional education, or in setting requirements for the major. Yet these same tasks have always proved very difficult for the nonconcentration part of the A.B. or S.B. degree. College teachers are highly trained in specialized fields. An overwhelming majority agreed on the importance of concentrations and only a small number of professors felt that free choice outside the concentrations would result in an optimal college education.

"It is interesting to note that the so-called Yellow Pages--our initial call for a review of undergraduate education--contained a great deal of criticism of the status quo and asked for faculty reaction. A few hundred professors replied, and nearly all of them agreed with the negative evaluation of the state of affairs in 1974. Sharp disagreement emerged only when solutions were proposed.

"A number of major institutions had begun the process of curricular review. In most cases, the result was failure, i.e., faculties rejected the recommendations of their committees. For us, publicity always has been a problem. Harvard inevitably attracts attention, and from the very beginning the newspapers watched us closely. Their stories, mostly friendly, tended to exaggerate the potential significance of our work and also might have created a sense of outside pressure during the long debates.

Furthermore, a review of this sort cannot be done without a great deal of self-criticism. But the process of reform moved forward slowly through a series of documents building on and revising an initial set of proposals. Each version had its own critics and defenders, though gradually consensus emerged.

"Once it was agreed in principle that we needed a core curriculum, most felt that the inclusion of certain subjects or disciplines was a necessary sign of recognition and respectability. This is odd, because inclusion had to be determined with reference to basic liberal education--certainly not what occupied many highly specialized members of the faculty. Nevertheless, no one wanted to be excluded on the basis of field. Of course, these concerns were especially pronounced among the smaller, more peripheral fields: linguistics, history of science, etc. The existing General Education Program had welcomed everyone on a much less discriminating basis; now the test of acceptability was to be more rigorous.

"Before turning to a description of the process of consensus formation, let me pause to record the fact that our deliberations elicited substantive intellectual and pedagogical as well as political differences of opinion. But our focus here is on certain interest-group cleavages within the faculty and on ideological positions taken inside and outside the Harvard community.

"Educational policy in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences is in the hands of its members. Because of its size, the faculty does its business in a rather formal manner. Much of the business is routine, and receives routine approval. However, when issues are controversial, it is nearly impossible to predict the faculty mood. The task, of course, was to try and move such a large and diverse body toward a meaningful consensus. The steps were straightforward. First, in 1974, the Yellow Pages--an open letter from the dean of the faculty to all members--stated the issues and asked for reactions. This was followed by the appointment of seven task forces, the most important one focusing on

non-concentration requirements. That task force issued a report in 1976-77 which recommended a required core curriculum. Those proposals were studied by the Faculty Council and sent to all members of the faculty. Eventually, a motion, sponsored by the Faculty Council, was adopted nearly unanimously by voice vote. The motion said loudly and clearly that the faculty believed general education was indispensable and intended to recast it in a particular way, but left details of course design for further study.

"The summer of 1977 was spent largely in small group work, and ultimately the dean's office collated and combined the ideas into the Core Report of February 15, 1978. The Faculty Council spent many sessions on this document and prepared the legislation which was adopted by the faculty--with two basically procedural amendments--in May 1978.

"A simple description of these events is not very revealing. The critical point was the movement to consensus on substantive questions, and this is much more difficult to explain. In our opinion, the major factor was the broad faculty involvement in the whole process of reform. The original task forces, the summer groups, and the Faculty Council involved some sixty people. Certainly they did not all agree, but once they were engaged in the process, the idea of change seemed natural and congenial.

"Perhaps the most puzzling external criticism that occurred stems from a position that sees the core as a sellout either to the humanists or the scientists--which one does not really matter --and one gets the sense that something must be deeply wrong or corrupt in the very fact that agreement was possible. People of this persuasion are less interested in progress than in being true to their own little vision of the world. The most damning thing you can say to this group is: what we are proposing may not be perfection, but it is a vast improvement over the existing situation.

"We are persuaded that the case for our core curriculum is a practical one, grounded in the realities of university life, the intellectual needs of our students, and the character of work in a complex postindustrial society. The two key features of the core curriculum are its emphasis on modes of knowledge and its orientation to the contemporary world. It is essentially a response to the 'knowledge explosion'--which made knowledge almost inaccessible by virtue of its quantity, diversity, and difficulty, and yet essential because of the role it plays in the organization of society. The thrust of the core is to provide access to knowledge by showing what scientists, artists, writers, historians, social analysts, and philosophers do and how they can enlarge our understanding of the world we live in."

During the discussion following Dr. Rosovsky's presentation, interest centered on the place of the department in the university; this topic had been introduced earlier by Adele Simmons and would later in the afternoon prove to be the basis for argument that would involve many of the conference participants.

Dr. Simmons had said, "As we think about the kinds of changes that many of us would like to see in undergraduate curricula, we have to be very much aware of the practical limitations that the departmental structure imposes. These are not going to go away, and we're going to have to be enormously inventive as we try to devise ways of introducing changes into very traditional institutions." Others pointed out that the departmental structure was not inviolable, and perhaps in some ways had failed the student.

On the same subject, Walter Rosenblith described a prevailing student attitude that saw the professor as belonging to a department; the student as part of the larger university. "I think there is a problem today of trying to rethink structure. The structure of learning in our world is something that faculties do not often discuss, and I think they must come to grips with the

kinds of questions that students legitimately ask. We must tell them how things relate."

Lawrence Cremin agreed, and reminded those gathered that every department in a university has two responsibilities: one to its own expertise and the other to the continuing transformation of that subject matter so that it can be taught to people who are not specialists. On the subject of departmental structural problems, Dr. Cremin also stressed the importance of teaching method--something often overlooked. "We can," he said, "set up a beautifully designed curriculum that looks liberal in its design and is taught illiberally."

* * *

To begin the afternoon session, Dr. Colton introduced Joseph Schwab, whose charge was to comment on both the St. John's and Harvard curricula. Dr. Schwab discussed Eva Brann's paper first.

"First, concerning the curriculum of St. John's College as described by Eva Brann, the description is perspicuous. It sets forth clearly and with distinctness the philosophic foundation and the practices at St. John's. The description is believable and accords well with my first-hand knowledge of St. John's condition and conditioners of some years ago.

"Second, this description of the St. John's program shows that its purposes have changed in emphases from those set forth and exemplified in the decades that took their color from Scott Buchanan and Jacob Klein. One of these shifts is, in my view, a good one, the other deplorable. The desirable shift is seen in the ranking of 'development of sensibility' as one of the second-class citizens of St. John's republic of educational aims--a rank equal to that of 'sharpening of intellectual faculties.' It was not always so. Tragedy, comedy, the novel, even music, were, more often than not, resources for discovery of right opinion, and illustrations of ratio and proportion, rather than sources of being

moved and of pleasure of and through the senses. They were treated, if not described, as risks to pursuit of the intellectual life rather than a part of it. St. John's is to be congratulated on its welcome to sensibility and to efforts to give students access to objects of sensibility.

"The deplorable shift is seen, first, in the coordinate status accorded arts and authors--a coordinacy which carries with it the temptation to give to the arts (arts in the sense of practiced competences) the same severality and definiteness which authors enjoy by right. The coordinacy suggests that there are three distinct arts of language and four distinct grades of mathematics and science. The deplorable shift is seen again in the unqualified distinction of the nature of things and the nature of thinking. There was, at one time, recognition at St. John's of the interpenetration of thoughts and things, of the extent to which enquirers shaped problems and devised terms for their investigation, as well as confronted given problems and faced ineluctable facts. There was similar recognition of the interpenetration of the liberal arts with one another to constitute a dialectic whose unity arose from the mutual illuminations which things, ideas, and language throw upon one another. I smell, in this shift toward fixed distinctions, the rise of a covert doctrine.

"Third, it may be as well that authors are separated from arts and arts from one another, for such separations entail or make possible diversity of places among the duties which devolve upon the St. John's faculty, hence places for diversity of talents and training. The massive prudential price of the old (and the current) St. John's curriculum lay in the incongruity of its instructional demands on the one hand, and the developed competence and incompetence of the persons among whom it would normally seek its faculty. The incongruity was so great that St. Jonn's, of necessity, had to reeducate and deeducate its faculty candidates.

Moreover, for all the talk to the contrary, that reeducation required persons as well as books for teachers. The kinds of persons who could or can so function were and are in very short supply.

"My last comment on St. John's concerns a deemphasis in its curriculum which has survived time and change. It consists in St. John's refusal to recognize the person of the student as a proper object of education. More often than not, St. John's has boasted of this deemphasis by identifying concern for the person with such objects of derision as 'the whole man.' It has made only specious arguments for this omission, centering on the need to devote the limited collegiate resources of student time and energy to pursuit of intellect pure and simple.

"This prejudice appears the more disingenuous given the commitments which undergird the rest of the curriculum and the practices involved. I shall only hint at the commitments which entail explicit concern for the person as target of education.

"First hint: The Brann description of the St. John's program is shot through and through with the triple distinction, logic-physic-aesthetic (e.g., trivium as against quadrivium; nature of world--nature of thinking; intellect and sensibility). These three terms implicate a fourth. The full set is logic-physic-aesthetic-ethic. And ethics has at least as much to do with how good the actor is and how well he acts with others as with how good his actions are for others.

"Second hint: In Book I of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle makes his version of the commonplace division of the self into rational and appetitive parts. His version includes recognition, not only of a rational part per se but also a part which is quasi-rational--a portion of the appetitive which can be imbued with the rational--shaped by the rational as well as controlled by it--an outcome Aristotle calls desiderative reason or rational desire. It is by nature that man desires to know, but that appetite, as well as others, requires evocation.

"As to the practices at St. John's which practically imply concern for the person, one need merely point to St. John's choice of size--small size of campus, small size of seminar and tutorial. Such smallness is a guarantor that a community of some kind will exist, a civility which will inevitably shape its members. It will do so by the demands it makes, by the models afforded students by faculty, by other students, and by the heroes of its books, and by the interactions of students with faculty and with one another. Surely, St. John's, of all places, should take thought of how and to what ends these powerful instruments might be used.

"As to the Harvard Report on the Core Curriculum, it is designed to obtain political passage, not to explicate a curriculum. Whether the eventual curriculum is or is not a good one can be told only when the subcommittees which will design and approve the curriculum's constituent courses have done their work.

"If the vacuousness of the report is a just indicator of the faculty's ability to think seriously together about a liberal curriculum, the eventual curriculum is not likely to be a good one. The subcommittees must be drawn from the same faculty which will vote for the proposal. To the extent that these committees will be middling samples of the faculty, the curriculum will be timorous and questionable. To the extent that the subcommittees are better than the pool which yields them, the fruits of their work will be grimly and inevitably undermined.

"I shall point to three signs of the concessions to good educational sense which mark the report.

"First, the report is marked by the traditional sleights of hand by which an apparently substantial new program reassures existing special interests by providing exemptions, options, and placement examinations through which attrition is assured. The core, ostensibly fourteen half-courses, becomes, first, seven or eight, and in the end, a probable four or five for the modal student.

"Second, history, as subject matter or discipline, is given a status in the program which is indefensible except on grounds of political clout. It has the same magnitude as all the physical and biological sciences and mathematics taken together. It is made equal to all literature and all the other arts. It is coordinated with all social and philosophical 'analysis.' One cannot know from the document whether the political consideration involved is a matter of the number of covert and overt historians on the faculty or a matter of other faculty members' wish to make historians do as much of the core curriculum work as possible.

"Third, there is a pervasive timorousness about the stated aims of the core curriculum of each educational possibility as it arises. Thus, 'requirements in Literature and the Arts will acquaint students with important literary and artistic achievements' (emphasis mine). 'Acquaint,' indeed. God forbid that Harvard should try to bring the student firsthand to an aesthetic experience, render such experiences of literature and the other arts accessible to him or her. The curriculum will aim to develop a critical understanding of how man gives artistic expression to his experience of the world' (emphasis mine). Again, concern for the second remove ('critical'), and emphasis on the devices of literature and the arts ('how') and not on the effects of such devices, no expressed concern for enhanced sensitivity to the aesthetic object: a professional critic's view of the arts, not the interest of looker-reader-hearer.

"Similarly, the curriculum aims to develop 'students' abilities to think systematically about fundamental aspects of individual and social life' (emphasis mine). Again, the voyeuristic distance; no remark about enhancing the student's competence to arrive at defensible attitudes and positions on 'fundamental aspects of life.'

"The blame for this timid, ivied kind of program is not necessarily Dean Rosovsky's, nor even Harvard's. It rests in its

largest part on the American academy as a whole and on a large segment of the American population. The academy is interested mainly in pursuing its own scholarly-research interests and in readying successors. It has little interest in, and little knowledge of, education. As to the lay population, only a few students go to college for an education. They go, rather, to enhance chances for a better living. They go to obtain social graces and dining table conversation. They go to obtain a recognized status in our society, and to mark time for four years."

The critique by Joseph Schwab sparked lively controversy among the conferees, including a defense of their various positions by Eva Brann and Henry Rosovsky.

Dr. Brann and Dr. Schwab disagreed on some issues and matters of emphasis, but in Dr. Brann's view, the most important criticism was one that also troubled the St. John's faculty: that in some way the practical part of their program was neglected. Why, wondered Dr. Brann, "do so few St. John's students go into public life? Why do we seem in some way to damp ambition in them?"

Edward Sparrow, dean of St. John's in Annapolis, added, "It is true that some alumni feel rather alienated when they get out into the world. They sometimes cannot make sense of themselves after the years spent reading so many great minds. But I do not think that this is universal, and I think they eventually get out of it. In addition, I guess I put enormous stress on the character of the faculty in putting a bridge between the college and the world."

When attention turned to Dr. Schwab's criticism of Harvard's core curriculum, several themes were vigorously argued and analyzed by Dr. Rosovsky and the other conference members.

On one specific point, Dean Rosovsky vehemently disagreed with Dr. Schwab's criticism of the two phrases "informed acquaintance" and "critical understanding." As Dr. Rosovsky declared,

"They are not there by accident. They represent the view of some of us about what is achievable in a system that is very much constrained by time. In a sense, these phrases refer to a minimal standard, which one would wish students to go beyond. But I think that informed acquaintance and critical understanding are really what one should be aiming at in our kind of educational context. And it may in fact be that this is, if anything, too ambitious."

Dr. Rosovsky's objection to Dr. Schwab's critique had to do with his interpretation of political accommodation. The dean saw absolutely no reason for criticism. Indeed, "I do not understand how progress of any kind can take place without political accommodation. In fact, the only systems that I know of in which political accommodation is not a necessary part of progress are the kinds of systems in which I don't wish to live. When many people change something, obviously it requires accommodation, unless we are all people with one set of priorities, and you are not likely to find that in a university.

"The question is, is the result good; is it an improvement? And I would mind less if Mr. Schwab were to say simply that the result was poor without stressing that it is political accommodation."

In response, Barry O'Connell began by being sympathetic to the problems of achieving any kind of consensus, as we are "confronting a variety of increasingly fragmented constituencies--academic departments--with less and less in common with each other." But, added Dr. O'Connell, despite the attempts of various universities at reform, "we're going to go around spinning on a wheel that won't get us anywhere. I don't think we serve the future by saying that those people who insist that the first responsibility of the academic world is to be genuinely critical are being impractical and too demanding. Genuine criticism is what we're about."

"I think that we were critical; we were very critical," answered Dr. Rosovsky. "And the difference between us is something like this. I believe that our colleges and universities represent some of the very best institutions in this country. I believe that one can make a number of changes rather less radical than you would wish and still achieve a valuable result.

"My difference with you is not that I am afraid of revolution, but that I honestly don't see the necessity for it. I also do not agree that the departments are really the great stumbling blocks to the future of education in this country. If you abolish departments, you create a new set of problems. It seems to me that the departments do one thing for which there is no substitute --they exercise quality control over the people in their institutions. And fundamentally I still think that the quality of the institution is related to the quality of the people in it. The existence of departments ensures the highest possible quality."

Not all the participants agreed with Dr. Rosovsky about the value of the departmental system. Those in opposition generally pointed out what, in their opinions, were general failings, and all stressed the need for, in the words of Barry O'Connell, some sort of "counterbalancing force" within the university.

For example, Robert Belknap noted that "the universities have managed to institutionalize the demands of the fields in their departments. And all over the country they are struggling to find some way of institutionalizing the demands of the students. I wonder if Harvard is not asking the department to do both jobs. If it is, it is failing to recognize that there should be some sort of equally strong institutional entity to cope with the needs of the students."

Norman Cantor also was not impressed with the efficacy of the departments within the university; he saw their interests as being too narrow to attend to the greater good of the community:

"I think a real problem is the departmentalization and overprofessionalization of our faculty. I am amazed that Dr. Rosovsky says that the purpose of having departments is to provide standards for faculty. There are lots of other ways of doing that. Departments continue to train people in terms of their own narrow research."

Gerald Grant and Edward Sparrow both agreed that within certain limitations the departments have value. But, Dr. Grant stressed, although the average academic department might very frequently be a real intellectual community for faculty and associated graduate students, undergraduates rarely are included in that community. Mr. Sparrow, too, was interested in the undergraduate experience and said, "The only justification I've heard is that the existence of the department at the undergraduate level makes a concentration possible. Aren't there other, perhaps better, ways of providing for the development of the student's powers of reasoning and analysis than acquiring the concentration?"

Dean Rosovsky remained firm in his support of the departmental system. "I think departments are like democracy--it's a pretty poor system until you consider the alternatives--and they do, I believe, function more efficiently than any other structure I have seen. And all of us come from universities in which the department doesn't have the last word. There are review committees and so forth; it's a system that has many safeguards. In addition, I think that a misunderstanding has arisen as to the nature of a department. We are a faculty. The departments are subcommittees of the faculty, and our main allegiance is to the institution itself."

Although much of the conference had been concerned with specific problems of change and the liberal arts curriculum, almost all the participants had raised, at one time or another, more abstract questions about general reform and the place of the university in the moral education of students. Walter Rosenblith

saw the need for "our students to participate in the processes of inquiry" during the procedure of educational reform, and Henry Rosovsky believed that the new curriculum would "make the implied ideals more explicit" to the student.

But it was Alston Chase who raised a point that transcended mere curriculum reform when he said, "A question that the American academic community must face is just what its role is, and what its responsibility is toward the character development, toward the moral as well as the intellectual growth, of the individual."

The conference adjourned with the nearly unanimous sense that progress was being made toward clearing the way for a revitalized liberal arts core curriculum, not one suited only for the past but one appropriate for the fourth quarter of the twentieth century as well. The first step involved consensus that one could and should debate the meaning of an "educated" person. The means to accomplish that end would follow, and in a diversity of forms.

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